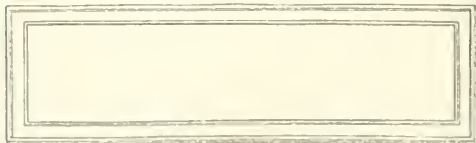
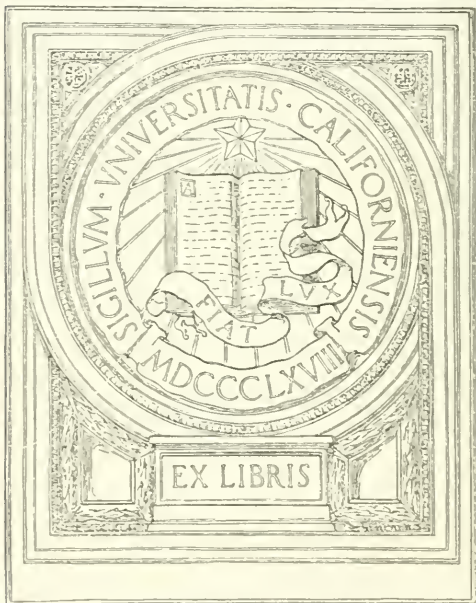




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BALLAD ROMANCES

By R. H. HORNE

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LONDON:

CHARLES OLLIER,

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THE NOBLE HEART.

A Bohemian Legend.

THE NOBLE HEART.

“ BRING from Bohemia’s woods and bowers
Chaplets, wreaths, and odorous flowers;
Ivy rock-grown in soft rains,
The purple crocus from the plains,
Scented sprigs o’ the dark green fir
Fresh from the sparkling mountain air,
With lilies white and azure bells
Cull’d in the deep Moravian dells;
But, oh! from Love’s own garden sweet,
Strew roses round the happy feet,
And weave in garlands for the bed
Of Hulda, who this day shall wed
Sir Ludolf, knight of Sonnenfels.”

Sir Ludolf is the valiant knight
Whose sword is only for the right,

And ever in the van hath he
Fought for his country's barest tree,
Whene'er encroachment waved a lance,
And 'gainst all insult, threat, mischance.
Or falling-off allegiance;
But never hath his banner flamed
Across the field by conscience blamed,
To win domains or mere renown
Of blood-stained Glory's empty crown.
He is a well-proved noble knight,
Equal in virtue and in might.

Hulda, the Sweet One, loved him well,
As olden legends simply tell,
And her young heart would ever rise
Whene'er Sir Ludolf met her eyes,
And when his valiant deeds and name
Were sung at feasts or festive game;
Yet midst the blazon of fame's scroll,
She honoured more his inward soul,
Feeling that something unexpress'd,
Was greater in his manly breast.

Wolfram of Lindenforst, her sire,
Consenting to their love's desire,
Proud of Sir Ludolf's broad domain,
And also of his knightly fame,
Worthy he deem'd of the great dower
Of Lindenforst—fields, woods, and tower—
Hath fix'd his daughter's bridal day;
And now 'midst wreaths and chaplets gay,
With lingering, tender pauses long,
Unto the altar moves the throng,
Singing the choral marriage song.

Gazing on flowers before her feet,
With cheek as fresh and smile as sweet,
Yet with a thoughtful tenderness
Which made not that resemblance less,
Hulda beside Sir Ludolf paced,
With trembling fingers interlaced;
While on the other side, her sire
Moved to the measure of the quire.
Tow'rd's her the head of Ludolf bent
In deeply passive ravishment,

And with a humble dignity
That brought the tears to many an eye.

But who comes riding o'er the mead,
With vesture soil'd, on foaming steed,
His vassals following far behind ?
His errand surely must be kind ?
Yet doth his high and urgent mien
Suit ill love's soft entrancing scene;
And in his hand he bears a lance,
That in the sun doth gleam and glance.
Tis Otto ! nephew of the king !
He nears—what message doth he bring ?

Saluting first the bride and knight,
Sir Wolfram, and the ladies bright,
The royal messenger address'd
The bride, with hand upon his breast.
“ Most lovely lady, pardon grant,
That with a voice all dissonant
I interrupt this choral song ;
But 'tis the king's injunction strong.

At Prague, ere nightfall, would he see
Knight Ludolf—on whose fealty
Doth princely Ottocar rely
For speed—as I for courtesy,
Since that my presence and my words
Must lack all grace in his regards.”

‘The bridegroom bow’d his knightly head:
“ Sir Otto, I obey!” he said.
“ I will forthwith to Prague repair,
Swift as my steed can breast the air;
Meantime, beseech you, if you may,
Your journey back awhile delay ;
With good Sir Wolfram sojourn make,
To rest, and of the feast partake,
Which in the halls of Lindenforst
This night——” What else he said was lost.

To Hulda turns Sir Ludolf now,
With cheek all pale and serious brow.
Deeply he gazes in her face,
Then bends his knee a minute’s space,

And whispers words that love alone
Could understand—and he is gone.

Where the last hill-top meets the skies,
Hulda long fix'd her tender eyes,
Still doubting if indeed her knight
Had vanished from her loving sight,
Or deeming that perchance once more
His plume above the hills might soar.
While thus she stood and gazed in vain,
Sir Otto, o'er his courser's mane
Bent his tall person with a glance
That seem'd to scan his pointed lance,
But on the beauteous Hulda's face
'Twas fix'd, in rapture with her grace.
Then with a gay and easy bound
Alighting on the flower-strewn ground,
Sir Otto cross'd her clear eye's beam—
And Hulda started from her dream.

Ludolf has ridden o'er the hills,
Cross'd mountain, forest, streams, and rills,

And while the nightfall's shadow wide,
Crept o'er the palace' eastern side
And slowly rose the first clear star,
He stood before King Ottocar.

“ Oh, valiant Ludolf!” said the king,
“ Thou’st ridden on an eagle’s wing!
I greet thee with my thanks—but thou
Yet further loyalty must show.
Behold this mouldering scroll, which bears
The characters of distant years!
It is an ancient prophecy,
And bodes disaster unto me.

*Whene’er the trees of Lindenforst
Climb Sonnenfels, with arms across,
A king shall die, a throne be lost!*

And then he added, inwardly,
‘ It well may be—it well may be.
Those two domains are each so wide,
If join’d, what evils might betide;
With too much power they might invade
My rights—to foreign arms give aid.’—

“Thou see'st, Sir Knight, what fate is sped
With Linden's heiress shouldst thou wed:
Those elms with loving arms will greet
Thy rocks—the blazon'd 'scutcheons meet—
And Ottocar his throne and life
Lose in some war, or civil strife.
Wherefore I charge thee, noble Knight,
Elsewhere thy vows of love to plight,
Nor deem with Hulda e'er to wed
With this dark peril o'er my head.
But since thou hast so valiantly
Approved thyself in each degree
Of honour and of chivalry,
And that thy name throughout the land
Ranks with the highest—take the hand
Of our fair daughter, who shall be
The bright reward of loyalty!”

The Knight gazed on his dusty cloak;
Its foldings slowly searched and shook,
While with a blank and aching eye,
He stared upon the prophecy;

Then bowing vaguely in the air,
Went pausing down the marble stair.

Next morn the King, at early hour,
Walking beneath his palace tower,
Along his terrace gardens bright,
Met unawares the noble Knight
With lofty air and visage light.
“ King Ottocar, I come,” said he,
“ To offer thanks on bended knee
For favours high; and next, to sue
Pardon that I, to love’s court true,
Must not accept the royal maid,
Nor lose life’s substance for a shade.
Whether this shade, O King, may be
Thrown from that darksome prophecy,
Or from my castle and domains,
I care not; both my heart disdains.
Broad lands no longer will I own;
But here resign them to the throne;
Hence in my love’s choice being free,
As thou from this fell augury,

I will return without my land,
And offer, thus, my empty hand
To Hulda,—who will understand.”

The King, astonish'd, bent his head
Forward with earnestness, and said:
“ Sir Knight, thou dost thyself great wrong,
And will repent it soon—and long;
For when a Knight hath lost his land,
Wealth, station, vassals, and command,
He must not deem a second time
That fortune's hand will help him climb.
Holds good thy will to do this thing?”
Sir Ludolf smiled—“ It does, liege King.”
Said Ottocar, with haughty mien,
“ Our daughter, sure, thou hast not seen!
Enough—God speed thee!” Said the Knight,
With humble air, but vision bright,
“ God speed me, sire, as I do right.”

Sir Ludolf now, his lands resigned,
Rode back with well-contented mind,

And in the halls of Lindenforst
Told, in brief words, how all was lost;
While Hulda's face shone by his side
A yet more proud and happy bride;
And all the knights and ladies fair,
Squires, vassals, and retainers there,
Sent up loud plaudits in the air;—
All save Sir Otto, who, aside,
Gnawing his lip, with lengthy stride
Pass'd out,—and save Sir Wolfram old,
Who bowed, but silent stood, and cold.

“Sir Wolfram, tell me,” Ludolf said—
“Was thy word pledged that I should wed
This Lady? Yes; but would'st thou fain
Accept me still, without domain?”
“'Twere Hulda's pride, and greater gain!”
Said Hulda, giving both her hands;
But Wolfram still in silence stands.
At last he said, “Sir Knight, we see
Thou hast done greatly, and art free

To wed, as heretofore,—and I
Applaud thy love and loyalty.
Yet must I ask a month's delay—
Our guests are gone—another day
We'll find right soon—and thus renew
The bridal rites with honour due."

Sir Ludolf said, "I acquiesce."
And Hulda smiled through her distress,
While something like a boding crept
Into her heart—alone, she wept:
And still Sir Otto, as their guest,
Remained, and oft her ear address'd.

Days fled, and true love's passion-flower
Put forth fresh buds with every hour,
Which Otto saw, yet constantly
He fed his hopes, and bent his knee.
On Hulda's steps he waited ever
With smile, and sigh, and soft endeavour,
To win regard,—yet sought in vain,
Creating nought save courteous pain.

Ere half this lingering moon was gone,
Sir Ludolf, on the castle lawn
Walking with her who held his troth,
Met Otto, and thus spake to both:
“ Sweet Lady mine, and royal Knight,
Let me have favour in your sight,
If what I say to either seem
Unfit, or suiting best the gleam
Of knightly swords; but since I see
This lady’s hand, though pledged to me,
Thou also seek’st, and that her sire
Stands sore perplex’d with our desire,
For that besides thy high degree
Thou shar’st the lands of royalty;
While I have nothing but my heart
And my good name,—I will depart—
Till the month’s end, and leave thee free
Thy suit to urge, and ruin me.
When I return, my lady’s word
Shall silence me, and sheathe my sword
If thou art chosen; and my hand,

Thee will I offer, princely friend,
And forthwith go to some far land."

Hulda's white brow Sir Ludolf held
Long time, and tenderly dispell'd
The pain that strayed across her face;
Then to Sir Otto left his place,
And from the castle straightway sped
Till the month's end, as he had said.

No day, no hour, no minute lost
The happy rival, on love's coast
Thus cast alone, and the fair isle
Left to the sun of his sole smile.
With courtly mirth and gay parade
He makes time seem to have no shade;
For o'er his pain, Hope shakes bright wings;
His tears are pearls,—and if he sings,
The plaint, like that of Philomel,
Is rapturous, and becomes him well.

'Twice sent he to King Ottocar
A trusty squire as messenger;

And with Sir Wolfram oft he spake
In private, loitering by the lake,
At twilight hour; and pointing down
To eve's star, that, reflected shone—
Then upwards to reality—
“As deep,” said he “and yet as high,
Burns the true love my breast within,
Full-filling all the space between.
Thy daughter will be mine, I ween.”

The old month died, the new month came,
And with it Ludolf's steady flame;
Sir Wolfram straight assembling all,
Guests, friends, and vassals in his hall,
Into the centre then he led
His daughter, and to Ludolf said:
“Sir Knight, our highest thanks to thee
Are due for thy love's chivalry,
Nobler than which has never been
Recorded, nor will e'er be seen.
But further do I not devise
Thy great and generous sacrifice

To put to proof. Thy rich broad lands
The King returns into thine hands,
And, as the friend we value most,
Welcome, our guest, to Lindenforst—
So long as it shall please you stay,
Now, or on future festive day.”

The Knight upon Sir Wolfram bent
His steady eye, and said, “Content:
Thy friendship welcome is to me—
But for the ancient prophecy?”
“That,” said Sir Otto, “as before
Remains; need we, Sir Knight, say more?”
Sir Ludolf now to Hulda turn’d,
With cheek like ashes newly burn’d,
That through their paleness once betray
A spreading gleam, then die away:
Said he with deep yet tender voice—
“The lady Hulda will make choice.”

By Wolfram’s angry looks unquelled,
Hulda her hand to Ludolf held—

“ Sir Knight,” said she “ take here thine own;
Thy lands, thereby, again are gone,
But let love reap what truth has sown.”

The Knight had clasp'd and closely press'd
That hand upon his lips and breast,
With heart too full for words to tell,—
When suddenly there ringing fell
Upon the pavement near his foot,
A gauntlet; all around were mute.

Sir Otto stood with flashing eyes:
To pure Love's starry mysteries
No longer he appeal'd, but sought
His claim and passion in the court
Of arms to justify. The Knight
He here defied to mortal fight.

Sir Ludolf with a bearing mild
Took up the glove, and, sighing, smiled;
Then glancing down upon his sword,
The castle left without a word.

He to a village straight repair'd,
And for the fight was soon prepar'd.

But seven days since—all secretly—
Had preparations due been made,
Suiting prince Otto's high degree,
And oft his arms had he essayed;
Training his steed right dexterously,
To face the sun or gain the shade;—
When now the lady Hulda sent
To pray his presence—and he went:
“'Tis well,” thought he, “she doth repent.”

“Sir Otto,” said the earnest maid,
“In arms for deadly feud array'd,
Thou wouldst appear to justify
A claim o'er me—which I deny.
My heart is to Sir Ludolf given,
Here, and when we shall meet in heaven;
I pray you, therefore, do not seek
My soul's fixt bonds by force to break;

Nor blot the debt of gratitude
I owe to thee by this fierce mood,
Unworthy Ludolf's nobleness,—
Of me,—and of thyself no less.
I would not see two noble men
Rush fighting as from out a den,
Like two wild beasts within a field,
To gain their prey—when one shall yield.”

“ Oh, princely Otto, quench this fire,
I am the only just umpire;
And I have chosen—all is done—
A battle may be lost or won ;
But I am Love's, by yon free sun !
If Ludolf kill thee, I shall say
'Twere pity—but thou hadst thy way !
If thou Sir Ludolf kill, be sure
My horror of thee will endure
Beyond all hope of time to cure.
Then peril not for me a life,
For never shalt thou call me wife !

“ Once more, bethink thee, ’tis not fair,
Thy chance with Ludolf’s to compare,
For thou hast but a life to lose—
He, life and love. Wilt thou refuse
A boon I ask of thee? Much love
Thou’st vow’d to me—some small part prove;
It is the first request I make,
I pray you grant it for my sake—
For your own honour, and the peace
You will hereafter feel; ’tis this—
Withdraw thy challenge, loftier stand,
And offer Ludolf thy true hand.”

Feeling, at each fresh pulse’s beat,
The world was slipping ’neath his feet,
Sir Otto stood a moment’s space,
Then spake with pale and haughty face—

“ Lady of Lindenforst, a sire
Can best dispose of maiden fire;
And good Sir Wolfram’s wish accords
With mine, and with this pass of swords.
The King, moreover, sanctions it.”

Within her bower doth Hulda sit,
Gravely and sadly, yet with pride
That she this fruitless homicide
For jealousy, self-love, revenge,
Had striven to forestall, and change
Into true honour's amity.
'But why not still be done,' thought she;
'And if not changed to friendliness,
I may prevent its fierce excess;
So to Sir Ludolf hied she straight,
And gently by his side she sate.

"My lord," said she, "you should approve
What I shall say; 'tis learnt of love,
And copied from the noble soul
Wherewith you gave to my control
My maiden hand, and vow'd to sheathe
The sword of rivalry beneath
Manly regard and fortitude.
Now, do I pray thee, shed no blood,
But take once more that lofty mood."

Said Ludolf, "Sweet One, thou dost know,
I offer'd not, nor sought a blow;
Sir Otto 'tis who hath defied
Me, to the death—the words abide
Though his young sword I may deride."

"Can Ludolf fear mere words," said she,
"Who hath so oft led victory
From rank to rank—made iron men yield,
And changed the fate of many a field?
Refuse this useless fight, and stand
Upon thy laurels! Take my hand,
'Tis ever thine, nor let me be
Fought for with brute ferocity,
Like some wild creature of the wood,
The trembling prize of madden'd blood.
There's nought to fight for—I am thine;
Thou shalt not fight, if thou art mine—
Thou wilt not if thou deeply lov'st."

"Lady," said he, "my heart thou mov'st
Deeply—with truth thou shak'st my soul;
But am I in mine own control?

Or e'en in Love's, when Honour's voice
Hath called me forth, and leaves no choice?"

"'Tis only honour's Shade," she said,
And rose with bright majestic head;
"The higher lesson *thou* hast taught,
Shows me this battle is worth nought,
Nor will I thus be sold and bought.
By love alone thy bride am I—
Fight—kill—and lose me certainly—
Take shadow, or reality.
It is a great request I make,
I pray you grant it for my sake."

Sir Ludolf took the hand she gave,
And kiss'd it with a sweetness grave;
Then said, "I promise!" and some space
He held her lock'd in his embrace,
And felt that truth was happiness,
Whether 'twere wise or not, in this.

Early next morn Sir Ludolf went
To seek Prince Otto, with intent

This mortal strife to set aside,
And then return with conscious pride
To claim his long affianced bride;
But on the way a herald loud
With voice and trumpet drew a crowd;
And Ludolf heard him there proclaim
The combat—time, and place, and name;
Then in his stirrups rising high,
This man, like chanticleer, did ery—
“Sir Otto, prince of Rabenstein,
Right valiant, of the royal line,
And far-renown’d Sir Ludolf, knight
Of Sonnenfels’ steep rock-towers bright,
The more to honour on this day,
When one shall fall and change to clay,
Will royal Ottocar resort,
This fight to see with all his court.”

Sir Ludolf with an aching arm
Returned unto the little farm
Where he abode, and pass’d the night

In prayer for fortitude, and sight
To see, and seeing, do the right.

With lustrous baldric, cross, and star,
And led by royal Ottocar,
The mailed knights all proudly ride,
And noble ladies grace their side,
Whose jewell'd robes cast arrowy rays,
While shields of steel and helmets blaze;
And colour thus with light contending,
Melts like rich fields with sunbeams blending.
Down the hill-side the cavalcade
Comes pouring like a bright cascade,
And soon the arena's space within
Thronging, they range with murmurous din.

Sir Wolfram slowly took his seat,
Pale and oft gazing on his feet;
And Hulda by his side appear'd,
With head and form erectly rear'd,
But deep eyes gazing anxiously,
And quivering lip, which all might see.

The crimson banners stream and flare.
The trumpets smite the brassy air;
The war-steeds neigh, and ramp, and sway,
And snuff the exalting battle-day,
Which to hot blood is more sublime,
Then all the scrolls and stars of time.
The herald now declares the terms
Of combat, which the King confirms :
“ Prince Otto doth defy the knight
Of Sonnenfels, to mortal fight;
The victor claiming as his prize
The Lady Hulda; he who dies,
Still earning honoured memories.”

This said, a sudden trumpet-blast
The barriers wide asunder cast!
A charger's hoofs with gusty bounds
A moment beat redoubling sounds,
And with inflamed and desperate face
Sir Otto dashed into the space !
His coal-black armour thick inlaid
With diamonds, cast a fretful shade,

That match'd his hollow cheek of ire,
Dark with a gall'd heart's spiteful fire.
His lance-blade waving to and fro,
Like to a serpent's tongue doth show,
Who fiercely threatens, yet doubts his blow.

He gazed around; the trumpets loud
Defiance sounded, high and proud;
The herald's voice again was heard
His speech repeating word by word.
He ceased;—and, with a measured pace,
Arm'd by the power within his face,
But else unarm'd, Sir Ludolf came
To justify his knightly fame.
Central he stood with lofty mien,
A beaming eye, a brow serene,
And none the silence dared to break:
All held their breath while thus he spake—

“ King Ottocar!—friends, courteous knights,
And dames! who know all honour's rights,
This challenge is a wrongful use
Of arms, which, therefore, I refuse!

When doubt exists, or honest chance
Of good success, to lift the lance
Is honest ; if the holy cause
Of truth, high virtue, nature's laws,
Our country's rights, our friend's fair fame,
Our king's just claims, our own good name,
In any shade were perill'd here,
Appeal we might to sword and spear.
But there is nothing now to gain,—
The prize Sir Otto's hopes would fain
Set up, is mine already, fast;
I would defend it first and last,
If there were need—but there is none—
The Lady Hulda hath been won—
The contest for her hand is done."

All eyes were now on Hulda turn'd,
Whose cheek with pride and gladness burn'd,
And to Sir Ludolf bowing low,
Then to the King, she said, "'Tis so!"
A murmur ran through all the throng,
Each felt his arm and heart so strong,

Yet knew not well what he should think,
For duty hover'd on a brink;
But Ludolf soon relieved their pain,
And thus, unanswered, spake again:

“ I know, my liege, a moral right
Seems dull beside a bloody fight,
And that sincere at heart to be,
Wins no applause like victory.
Men are but men; and, knowing this,
I take the world for what it is,
Leaving to each his proper thought,
Hoping the best, yet fearing nought;
And simply say,—a deadly fight
I will not wage, but claim my right;
And for the lady, love's free-will
To choose, above war's strength or skill.
Thus by Heaven's truthful grace we save
My rival's honour from the grave,
Since fame no golden memories hath
For bad return to friend's good faith;

And for *my* honour, 'tis the land
I cannot lose! On this I stand,
And lift to God my honest hand!"

Sir Ludolf bow'd, and left the place:
The silence held a minute's space,
And then a tumult rose, and each
Spake rapidly—or to beseech
The King to hear what he would say—
And ladies hasten'd, in dismay,
To fly their seats—while o'er the ground,
His armour ringing at each bound,
Sir Otto fiercely rode around!

The throng dispersing, held dispute,
If loss of knighthood absolute
Were not the certain consequence
Of misplaced reason's gross offence?—
A few believed 'twas greatly done
In Ludolf, who long since had won
War's laurels, and could well afford,
To plead love's cause with a sheath'd sword.

Yet, in the end, they all agreed
It was a most unknightly deed:
A mortal challenge had been given—
No lance was shiver'd, breastplate riven;
No side with gory wounds ran down;
No helm was crush'd into the crown;
No man and steed roll'd grim and ghast,
Foaming with rage, while life ebb'd fast
Upon the hot and torn-up field;
No soul's last hope in blood was seal'd,
While death-pangs gasp'd, 'I will not yield!'
God, Nature, Love, and Future Life,
All merged in the insensate strife;
As if such things in heart and brain
Had ne'er been founts of bliss and pain,
Or murder ruled the world of Cain.

The customs of a warlike time
Were outraged by this peaceful crime.
A mortal challenge had been given—
A knight had talk'd of right and heaven,—

Of reason, of his lady's *love* !
Disgracing thus shield, spur, and glove!
And must henceforth accounted be
An outcast from high chivalry!

These evil words soon reach'd the ear
Of Hulda, who, with many a tear,
Declared aloud she was the cause
Of Ludolf's breach of knighthood's laws;
'Twas she who would not set her hand
The prize of lance, or reeking brand;
"All rests with me!" she cried: in vain,
"A knight," they said, "must never stain
His valour, howsoe'er it please
His lady-love to toy and tease;
Sir Ludolf, too, was no raw youth—
Mature of years, he knew, forsooth,
All ordinances and degrees
Of courts and camps; and no soft breeze
From Cupid's pinions, or the sighs
Of one so young with hazel eyes,

Should e'er have marr'd or turn'd aside
His manhood and his knightly pride."
" Yes," said the King, " the stars malign
Above his house make fatal sign:
He is no longer knight of mine!"

“ Now, lastly,” did Sir Wolfram say,
“ Thou seest, Sir Knight, thou hast thy way;
My daughter, also, hath her will,
So far; but if she love thee still—
Which may be true some little while—
Her sire she never shall beguile.
Thou mayst be good, thou mayst be brave,
But my consent she shall not have;
Nor canst thou *ask* it of me now.”
Said Ludolf, “ I receive the blow
Into my heart; yet must I ask,
Why not consent?” “ I wear no mask,”
Sir Wolfram answer'd; “ and I say
I hold thee sullied since the day
Thou with Prince Otto wouldst not fight,
But spak'st instead of love and right.

Good thou mayst be—brave thou hast been—
Mayst be so still—but men have seen
Thy once high reputation fall.
Thou know'st thy loss; I have said all;
Except to ask, *wouldst* thou thy shame
Link to my daughter's noble name?"

The answer was an inward groan,
And Wolfram left him there alone.
Alone, alone stood the sad Knight
Nor saw that soon a form, in white,
Flowing wide, beside his feet,
Knelt down. It spake all piteous sweet:
"Sir Knight, I kiss thy honour'd sword;
Thy hand I take as once thy word,
And press it to no heart of stone,
Yet one that never can atone.
Canst thou forgive what I have done?"

"Hulda!" he said; "thy voice hath made
My tears to gush. I am the shade
Of him thou loved'st." "Nay," she said,

“ The same as ever, yet far more.”
Now Ludolf, bending gently o’er,
Raised her, and said, “ Oh, can I take
Thee to a heart thus doom’d to ache?
And yet I think it shall not break—
Not quite—but live on for thy sake,
Or for thy blessed memory,
Since thou thyself art lost to me.”
“ Ah, never lost,” she cried, “ while life
Beats in this frame!—all the mad strife,
And all the evil fallen on thee,
Are caused by love, or caused by me;
And I will truly pay that debt,
My honour’d lord.” Said he, “ Not yet;
For I am now a ruin’d tower,
And days of tempest o’er me lower.”

While yet he spake, a vassal train
Came with Sir Wolfram back again,
To bear her off; and while ’twas done
Three knights rode by at set of sun.
They check’d their steeds, and thus said one:

“ How changed is Ludolf—see ye there!
Mute, passive, with a lingering stare
He suffers men to seize his bride,
While standing fondly at his side;
Then silent droops all pale and lone,
And sits upon a boundary-stone!”
The second said—“ His spirit lost,
Now, ghost-like strays, round Lindenforst:
It is not Ludolf that we see.”
The third advanced right bitterly—
“ Thou art a recreant knight!” he said;
And Ludolf rose, and struck him dead!

Now was his finely balanced mind
And temper lost in raging wind.
Away into the woods he strode,
And there unseen cast off his load
Of grief, and loosed his passion high,
So long restrain'd with mastery.
He scored on rocks his country's wars,
He beat his breast, and scorn'd his scars,
Then call'd upon his ancestors;

And to his brain the echoes seem
Like their reproachful spirits' scream!
Now would he sit with sinking sadness—
Now grasp and sway huge boughs with
madness—

Now hurry panting through the bushes—
Now stand and gaze on plashy rushes.
He had done nobly, right and strong,
And all the world declared him wrong,
And made his name a mockery song!

Meantime had Hulda in her bower,
Been closely guarded, day and hour:
Sir Wolfram swore by his soul's life
He ne'er would see her Ludolf's wife;
And Hulda bore his bitter mood
With mute yet painful fortitude,—
Save once she answer'd—"All this ruth,
From his great heart's devoted truth,
And our dishonest littleness,
Directly comes—beyond redress.

His lands he cast into the air
For us, and we have left him bare.
We are of earth, and he of heaven."

No more hath angry Wolfram striven
To crush her hopes, but suddenly
She found she had her liberty,
And forth might on her palfrey ride,
Or loiter through the orchards wide.
And now once more with golden spur
And snow-white plume, a visitor
To Lindenforst, Prince Otto came,
And press'd his suit—to Hulda's shame,
And hatred, and her fresh alarm,
Lest it should bode some deadly harm.
"Oh God!" unto herself said she,
"They have slain Ludolf secretly!"

Near Sonnenfels there is a cave,
As secret as a hermit's grave;
With shell-like windings far it strays
Beneath the rocks, in secret ways.

Fronting the mouth there sleeps a lake,
Whose deep blue surface ne'er doth break
In waves, nor with one ripple wake;
Silent and still, like death, it lies,
With face turn'd upward to the skies.
By rocks and hills 'tis compass'd round—
They echo, but create no sound;
And on the lake is nothing seen
To part what is from what has been,
Save that beside the far banks float
White lilies and a broken boat.

Within the cave, a figure dark
Watches a wood-fire's dying spark,
That through the deepening shades of night,
Can send no more its pale red light.
It dies; and then, as with a thrill,
When thought hath ended in a will,
The figure rose and hasten'd forth,
With steady stride of might and wroth.

One eve when Lindenforst was gay
With feast and dance and mirthful play,

And Hulda sigh'd, while o'er the hall
Shone Otto's princely person tall,
And she felt dark amid his light,—
A Phantom pass'd before her sight!
She saw a lofty spectral form,
Of knight and steed, as in a charm!
Down gazing on the castle lawn,
Through the wide lattice, open thrown,
It moved like shade! Cold as a stone,
She to the terrace-walk hath flown;
“Oh, God!” she cried, “’tis he! ’tis he!
And they have slain him secretly!”

Hastily down the winding stair,
Straight to the lawn doth she repair.
The solemn mists are rising fast,
And soon the lights and sounds are lost;
But onward still she breathless sped:
“Oh, love!” cried she, “if thou be'st dead,
Thy noble blood is on my head!”

She reached, and passed in dreamy state,
The broken vision of a gate,

And down the misty orchard slope
She ran, and found her fearful hope!
Between two distant, grey-limb'd trees,
The Phantom of a knight she sees,
Upon his steed, in armour clad,
All stately, motionless, and sad,
And like a figure in the clouds!
The creeping mist so closely shrouds,
That leg of steed or plume of knight
Alike seem framed of vapoury light!
She paused, and stood awhile in dread,
Then clasping soft her hands, she said:—

“ Oh, Phantom of a valiant knight!
Who gav'st to me the priceless right
To call thee lover and liege lord,—
If by some dark and treacherous sword
Thou fell'st, oh, pardon me the crime!
Speak to me gently—and in time,
While yet my trembling knees sustain
This struggling heart—this dizzy brain!

Speak gently—in thÿ pity, speak!
Com'st thou thy murderer here to seek?
In life and death behold me thine!"

The Phantom slowly made a sign:
Its right hand raised with beckoning air—
And Hulda stood awe-stricken there!
But love is stronger than despair.
Towards the Phantom, pace by pace,
She moved, and look'd up in its face,
Resign'd and sweet. With slow embrace,
The Figure, bending from his steed,
Raised her up gently, and with speed
Through the white mist they fade away!

Soon was Sir Wolfram in dismay!
Hulda had vanish'd from the hall;
Nor search can find, nor cry, nor call;
And vassals hurry, pale, to tell
Of Spectre-knight, who, by a spell,
Smote to the earth five armed men,
With shadowy lance of hell, and then

Drew down upon the castle lawn
The Lady Hulda, who, forlorn,
Before him on his steed was borne.

Some brief time did Sir Wolfram brood,
And then took horse in vengeful mood.
Though she was gone he knew not where,
He guess'd with whom, in his despair;
And calling Otto to his side,
For Prague forthwith they fiercely ride.
The King on this shall now decide.

Unto the cave beside the lake
The Spectre doth the lady take;
Oh, well that lady knew, I wis,
It was no spectre's tender kiss.
"Sweet One," he said, "here rest secure,
Till safe escape I can ensure
To distant lands, where I may build
A bower for thee, in some green wild,
And we forget the high degree
That once was ours, and ever see

A higher bliss in love and truth,
Such as all feel in early youth,
But few retain: their hearts are lost
In the world's dust, and all its cost.
Not so with ours; for our domains
Shall be in love's unbounded plains,
And we will bless the fields and flowers,
And of our former halls and towers
Speak pleasantly in idle hours."
And Hulda smiled to hear the Knight
Talk thus, and said, with visage bright,
"Our future rises like the light."

Meantime a peasant girl he brought
To tend on Hulda, while he sought
How best to leave, with least delay,
Their still beloved Bohemia.
At a green village, once his own,
Near Sonnenfels' bright towers of stone,
He dwelt within a cot alone;
And at the purple break of day,
Down to the cave he made his way,

With scrip and staff, in palmer's weed,
His prison'd birds to tend and feed,
Smiling to find their little need.
The lovers won, though brief the space,
More happiness in this lone place
Than wealth could give, or time efface.

Along the borders of the lake
In love's deep silence do they take
Their walk each morn; or if they speak,
Their theme of future life doth break
Into low murmurs; oh! too strong
The present is, for love or song
To reason o'er, except in dreams.
But, soon as sunrise darts its beams
Across the lake, and gilds the mouth
Of that dear cave, the path uncouth
Through secret ways, once more he takes,
And finds the village, ere it wakes.

Oh happy Time! why hast thou wings,
When we would have thee ever stay?

Why hath Hope's lute so many strings,
That some change tone with changeful day?
Life's sweet illusions have no stings;
Then wherefore can we not their power
Retain, and dwell beside the springs
That image Beauty's perfect flower?
Five days of bliss, and all was o'er!
Sir Ludolf at the cottage door,
Returning, met fair Hulda's sire,
Who thus address'd him in his ire:—

“Thou hast my daughter in thy hands,
Somewhere conceal'd 'midst those wild lands
That skirt the base of Sonnenfels;
But held, by force, or fraud, or spells.”
“I have,” said Ludolf, “by my will,
And her consent—thus to fulfil
Our long betrothment, and to save
Her feelings from a living grave.”
Cried Wolfram—“Oh, perverse of soul,
Beyond right reason or control,

Are both of ye! To each the hand
Of royalty in wedlock's band
Was offered; each refused the dower
Of fortune—and shall curse the hour.
Restore my daughter, or a blow
From powers hard by shall smite thee low—
Restore, forthwith!"—said Ludolf, "No!"

"Proud madman!" cried the angry sire,
"See'st thou yon corn-field's glancing fire!
It is the polish'd helmet-glare
Of nine score vassals hidden there,
Ready whene'er I give the word
To rush upon thee with the sword!
What canst thou do who stand'st alone?"

The Knight's dark eye-ball swell'd and shone,
While, rigid as a god of stone,
His form he rear'd and scann'd the fields!
"Sir Wolfram," said he, "no man yields
Whose cause is good and arm is strong,
Nor shall I thus alone stand long.

Think'st thou, when Sonnenfels I gave
Unto the King my love to save—
Gave freely, villages and towers—
I also gave their free-born powers?
I never gave their human hearts!
All these are mine. One word—and starts
From every side a friendly band,
Beside their lord to fall or stand.
Go to thy men—they spoil the corn!”

As one who searcheth for a thorn,
That through his sleeve his flesh hath torn,
Sir Wolfram bent sometime his head.
“I move thee not by this,” he said;
“But somewhat for thy secret ear
I have. The sword thou may'st not fear,
Yet thou wilt hearken seriously
To what I now shall say to thee.
Into this cot awhile repair;
The villagers throng round and stare,
Whispering in knots, with threatening air!”

Now Hulda left the cave when night,
Was sinking 'neath the rising light,
And, by the margin of the lake,
Watch'd the slow purple form and break,
Till rosy streaks fill up the space,
And then soft gleams of gold enlace
One ridge of clouds. Why comes he not?
He hath just reach'd the accustomed spot
Upon the rocks, in his descent,
But there remains, with looks down bent.
He sees her, yet he doth not move—
He knows on him her eyes of love
Are fix'd, and still he stands above.
At length, adown the pathless steep,
With heavy foot, and breathing deep,
He comes, like one who walks in sleep.

“Hulda,” he said, with tender air,
“Sweet One—sweet hope, and sweet despair—
Our days are ended. I must now
Fulfil a miserable vow,

And to thy father take thee home.
Have faith in me—my Hulda, come !
But wherefore—how it haps—what words
He hath, beyond a thousand swords,
To make me do this wretchedness,
I may not speak, nor canst thou guess.
Enough, that I must do this thing.”
“ Ah, Ludolf!” said she, trembling,
And in a broken voice, with face
Death-pale—“ ah, Ludolf!” From the shore
Of that loved lake, in wonder sore,
She went with him, but spake no more.

Unto her father’s castle, straight
He led her through the dreadful gate,
And felt its iron soon would part
Life’s heaven from his darken’d heart.
Beneath an ancient laurel tree
That in the court hung heavily,
He paused; and, taking both her hands,
Before her silently he stands,

Sighing, and looking in her face.
She gazed once round the vacant place,
And then the tears gush'd through her eyes—
“ Ah, why is this?” lost Hulda cries.

Still stood the Knight in silence deep :
His anguish chokes—he cannot weep.
At last he spake—“ Oh, image bless'd
Of day and night—my hope's sole rest—
That I resign thee now, is best.
Something there hangs amid the air,
Like torches poisoning as they flare,
And therefore must I now restore
My treasure; nor may I say more.
Yet, oh, believe by all thou'st known
Of me, in happy days now gone,
That in this final act I see
My right course—love's necessity.
And now, sweet Hulda, let us take
A last embrace—I must not make
Time pause, or I should ne'er depart.”

Cried Hulda, with a wakening start,
“Where go’st thou, then? where dost thou go?
And when return’st?—why look’st thou so?
Thy looks do cleave my heart in twain—
Thy voice doth beat within my brain—
And all around me fast doth reel,
And hum with many a torturing wheel!
Thou hast a purpose in thine eye—
Thou wilt not leave me here to die?”

The Knight within his arms enclosed
Her form, and tenderly disposed
The locks that stray’d about her face;
Then, pressing fast in his embrace,
Breathed slowly in her ear, with sighs,
His passion’s farewell memories.

“Sweet One,” he said, “my early hours,
And all the radiance they have seen,
Were pass’d amid the sun-lit towers
Where I had hoped to see thee queen.

I knew that fortune often showers
Her blessings from behind a screen,
Where brooding lie destroying powers,
Who, at a moment, rush between.
Yet all around seemed passing fair;
My queen an Angel soon became;
How could I dream of tempest air,
While golden clouds bore Thee and Fame?

“ But fate swept from me earth’s fair greenness,
And left me standing bare and lone,
And slander, with a bitter keenness,
Pierced to the marrow of each bone;
Yet still I saw thee in the air—
My Angel—how could I despair?

“ What next thou know’st—ah, do I say
In air I saw thee—down to me
Thou cam’st, and, in my ecstasy,
I felt all life was one bless’d day.
The Angel I had seen above,
Had also lips and arms of love.

“ Now doth a voice shout in mine ear,
 ‘ Thy life is but a hollow helm!
Scorn shakes pale dust o’er Passion’s bier—
Rust eats the lightning from thy spear—
 And plague-winds do thy house o’erwhelm!
Thy Hopes are grey, and in their hearts
 Are thrust envenom’d swords and darts!
The Shadows of thy former fame
Float by, and wave like blacken’d flame
 The banners of each battle day—
 And then to shadowy foes resign!
Despair!—despair!—nor slander’d name,
 Nor ruin could thy soul dismay;
But from thy soul-sustaining shrine
 Thine Angel now is borne away!”

What more, he said, in calmer tone,
She answer’d only with a moan;
What consolations, blessings, prayer,
He sought to breathe upon her there,
She did not feel, or could not hear;

And so he went his wretched way,
His cold breast full of heavy clay.

The stars their vigil lamps are burning;
Thou can'st not see the rising moon;
Through darkness it is upward yearning,
And earth lies outstretch'd in a swoon.
Ah, couldst thou to thy youth returning,
Of nature crave a life-long boon,
'Twould be to feel that every sorrow
Would change, as day must to the morrow,
Or alternate with pleasure soon.
But now, yon sad and lonely man
Walks as if night were the full span
Of all his life—his boundary vague;
Meanwhile another deems the morning
Will ever bring the same adorning
That now o'ergilds the towers of Prague.

The shadows on the palace towers,
Its crowding roofs and buttress'd walls,

Sleep deeply, as when midnight's hours
Swept o'er them with their flowing palls.
Those towers and walls stretch round a fane,
Enclosing it with stone-wrought plan
From a gross world—a king's sole gain—
Like some vast central talisman.
Mark where the grey cathedral spires
Spring up from darkness, and display
Their summits, touch'd with beaming fires
That tell the swift approach of day.
Now 'midst the solid forms below
Of coigne, slant roof, square slab, or cell,
The warm lights creep, then gleam and glow
Throughout this palace-citadel.
And last, beside the black-bank'd moat,
Where tree and weed scarce breathe the air,
The light descends through clefts remote,
Startling rank boughs with golden hair!

From his long range of walls, the king
Beheld the sun o'er Prague arise;

And next the crowded marshalling
Of gorgeous tools for victories:
Nobles, knights, vassals, all his men
At arms, and each brave denizen
Of Prague, and all Bohemia's towns
That sought his love or fear'd his frowns.
Against the Emperor now he wars;
It is proclaim'd—and this the cause.

Rudolf of Hapsburgh long had sway'd
With high dominion; and the shade
Of his far sceptre cross'd the throne
Of Ottocar, who held his crown
In fief;—but he would rule alone.
Well hath he watch'd the starry signs,
Which seem'd to favour his designs,
And ripen fast the fruitful hours;
So now, assembling all his powers,
He will cast off the splendid chain,
By sudden stroke on battle plain—
A galling yoke will trample down,
And free Bohemia's fetter'd crown.

Such were his words, and the war-cry
Was "Ottocar and Liberty!"
Yet in the King's unspoken mind
Lurk'd somewhat more; though soldiers, blind
To all save victory, did not dream
Of vast ambition in his scheme,
Which pointed at the Imperial throne,
While striving to redeem his own.
He led the march—the Danube cross'd—
And his first battle-day had lost,
But that a Knight, with vizor closed,
And arms unknown, his sword opposed
Where'er the ranks of Ottocar
Seem'd failing; and the cross and star
Upon the stranger's night-black shield
Inspired them, till they won the field.

But while retiring to encamp,
The vanguard in a reedy swamp
Benighted flounder'd—man and horse—
And stragglers from the Emperor's force
Mingled among them unawares.

The unseen foe slant down their spears,
And with each other whisper low.
They watch the moment for a blow,
But know not that it is the King.

Sir Otto now the reins doth fling
Upon his courser's neck, and galls
His flank, while to the men he calls.
The men respond—the King's steed rears,
His frighten'd form, with spiky ears,
And while Prince Otto to his side,
Through the deep marsh-weed strives to ride,
The foemen dart upon the twain—
Unhorse them, and with wrench and strain,
In darkness, 'midst wild blows of death,
Drag them away, gasping for breath,
Beyond the marsh—across a moor—
Over a bridge, and through a flood,
Then plunge into a thorny wood.

The King and Otto they had cast
Upon the sward, and bound them fast.

Counsel among themselves they took,
And then their leader roughly spoke—
“Great lords we know ye both must be:
Our booty mates with your degree.
If for your ransom some great treasure
Ye can bestow—at our own measure—
We will desert the Emperor’s ranks;
If not, your heads must win his thanks,
And other recompence. But hark!
Some one comes rushing through the dark!
Hear ye the boughs crash?” Further word
He utter’d not; a sudden sword
Gleam’d through the trees, and, with a groan,
He fell; but fell not there alone,
For the same sword, with backward stroke,
A comrade’s raised arm met and broke,
Who, falling, overthrew a third,
And both roll’d struggling on the sward.
Now swords clash’d swords—blows beat down
blows—
None knew the number of his foes,

Nor—in the strange, confusing strife,
While each fought for his proper life,—
His friends knew,—nor could understand
Whence came, or whose the dreadful hand
That in the darkness wrought this work.

But presently a vivid spark
A soldier fires—a torch illumes—
All see, with terror, through the glooms,
The unknown Knight, whose cross and star
Had won the field for Ottocar!
At once they fled. The stranger Knight
Stoop'd low, and from their prostrate plight
Released Sir Otto and the King,
And led them, quickly following,
Beyond the wood, upon a plain,
Where pointing far as eye could strain,
In the moon's light that now broke forth,
He said, "It is a safe, straight, path:
Yonder lies Ratisbon—adieu!"

Back, 'midst the trees, the Knight withdrew,

And straightway Otto and the King
Made for the city, wondering
At their mischance, and good escape;
But for the Knight,—his voice and shape,
And more, his deeds, did well proclaim,
What they must blush to speak—his name.

He came no more. In Ratisbon
The King collects his legion,—
Calls for fresh aid throughout his land
To join him; here to take his stand;—
First, for unshackled sovereignty;
And next, to claim Imperial sway.
All this he now makes known abroad,
And chief command of the van-guard
He to Sir Ludolf doth award,
Or to the Stranger-Knight who bore,
In the late fight, the cross and star.

Sir Ludolf came not, nor the Knight.
Again the King, with banner white,
Sent forth a herald to proclaim
His purpose, adding to the name

Of Ludolf,—“ Lord of Sonnenfels;
Whose lands—unless he still rebels—
The King restores, and offers him
Mines that his coffers shall o’erbrim
With diamonds, garnets, silver, gold,—
Lordship o’er Rabenstein to hold;
Command—power—opportunity—
His honour to redeem thereby.”

To this, ere long, a peasant brought
An answer to the warlike court:
He said, “ From the green glens that lie
Our old Moravian forests nigh,
A man who dwells there hath me sent
To warn the King against his bent,
And say, ‘ If he will now declare
Bohemia’s freedom, and forbear
All grasp beyond,—the just disdain
Sir Ludolf feels for bribing gain
Shall not withdraw him from the cause.
Touching his honour—need is none
To redeem *that*—long since well won,

And never lost; but meantime he
Counsels Bohemia's majesty,
With humble hope he will preserve
His own high honour,—never swerve
From his first oath to break his chain;
But seek not on the battle-plain
Unlawful empire to attain,
Risking a new and stronger claim,
With certitude of death or shame."

The King received these words with rage,
Then conn'd the astrologic page,
Reading bright signs of good success,
And one dark chance with no redress;—
One dark, 'tis true,—but hopeful, nine;
Thus reason and the stars conjoin,
And he the Emperor's throne will claim,
Although the pathway lead through flame.

Sir Otto left the King, aggrieved,
And griffin-like in his fierce mood,

Though not of Rabenstein bereaved,
Yet feeling stung throughout his blood,
Since the King's offer to confer
On Ludolf his dominion, bore
The certainty of scorn or hate,
No future gifts could compensate,
Nor soothe the sore indignity;
And so to Rabenstein went he,
Threaten'd with wrath by Ottocar,
When he should end his present war.

A gloom o'er Lindenforst is hanging;
Droops not its banner like a pall?
The raven's funeral wing is clanging
Above the garden's ivied wall:
At intervals there comes a sighing
Through leafy trees, and the soft breeze
Whispers there is some one dying,
While some one prays on bended knees.
'Tis old Sir Wolfram. Hulda listens
His feeble syllables to hear;

His eye yet glazes not, but glistens
With meaning, and a parting tear:
He says—" My child, bend low thy head,
Approach me closer with thine ear—
Think kindly of me when I'm dead.

" Thou know'st I held thee ever dear,
But also will I now confess
I loved the world, its wealth and state,
So much, thy happiness seem'd less.
I saw thee choose a noble mate—
Sir Ludolf answer'd well my aim,
But when his broad lands he resign'd,
A Prince seem'd better to my mind—
What father had not felt the same?

" Fathers and mothers deem the World,
Its wealth and ways, the wisest thing,
And Love, a leaf that's idly curl'd,
Frail as one feather of a wing.
But on our death-beds when we lie,

The World rolls backward palpably;
Love's leaf, we know, hath stem and root;
Its wing unto the skies doth shoot;
Its wisdom doth with Heaven appear,
And as we die, our eyes see clear.

“ Sir Ludolf bore thee safe away,
And might have held thee to this day;
Yet somewhat wrought upon his mind.
He brought thee back—all hope resign'd.
My words unto his secret ear
Were these—‘ For Hulda, take thou fear;
For if she quit her sire for thee,
I cast her from me utterly!
My curses on her head shall rain,
Who doth my 'scutcheon basely stain;
And I will publish as her dower,
‘ She is thy shameless paramour!’
I know 'twas false; but, Hulda, hear—
Thy tears are vain—reproach forbear;
Yet more—I said, ‘ Thy soul I'll wring;

See'st thou this order of the King,
That she be branded, and her head
Be forfeit, if with thee she wed!
I meant not this should be; I knew
Sir Ludolf's love was great and true,
And he would sacrifice his heart
For thy sake, as he had his land——
My sense fails—oh, a sorry part
Have I play'd—let me hold thy hand!
I labour for a little breath—
I have no sight—above—beneath—
Yet see within my darkness, death!
I hear the drift—all time is sand,
And I sink through—where is thy hand!"

And so this world-wise father died:—
His daughter's happiness was lost,
And she beheld herself, and sigh'd,
Sole heiress now of Lindenforst.
Meantime her vassals, and all those
From Sonnenfels who march'd to aid

The King, by one consent arose

And said, " We will not lift a blade!

Sir Ludolf was our own liege lord;

By this wrong strife he will not stand,

And he hath left his rock-crown'd land,

Which the false King hath not restored.

Sir Wolfram, he is dead and gone,

And Hulda shall our lady be;

The King's mad war—the Emperor's scorn—

Will lead at best to slavery.

To our own fields we will return!"

Not long did Hulda vainly mourn

O'er Ludolf's loss, and cruel wrongs,

But from her faithful vassal throngs,

Now fast returning from the war,

She chose a well-tried follower,

And with a small attendant train

Rode forth, to cross wood, stream, and plain,

Tow'rs the Moravian mountain chain.

Meantime, Prince Otto sore perplex'd,
With rage and fear alternate vex'd,
And dreading if the King return'd,
His castle seized, and sack'd, and burn'd,
Hasten'd to Prague, and there besought
The Princess to receive his court,
And with sweet favour hear him plead,
As royal cousin should, indeed.
The Princess answer'd with sad smile—
“Sir Otto thou shouldst not beguile
My ear, since that my royal sire
Against thee cherisheth sharp ire,
And will refuse thy proffer'd hand.”

But Ottocar doth lift the brand
For one great blow while thus they talk,
And, as a restless hungering hawk
That fiercely speculates and spurns,
Hovers, darts, settles, soars, by turns—
So doth his passion seek to gain
The prize, whate'er it cost of pain.

He sees the Emperor's force advance;
He will not see his own dark chance;
But forth he sweeps with one hot thought—
Imperial Power,—all else is nought.

Beneath Moravia's violet mountains,
The grassy dells are soft and deep,
And rocky rivulets and fountains
Murmur in shade, like dreams in sleep.
The murmur of each throbbing voice
Loses itself in forest leaves,
That tremble as they would rejoice,
Yet know some woodland spirit grieves.
Thither came Hulda with a moan
At heart, yet hopeful in her soul;
Attendant—train—they all are gone;
She bade them wait behind a knoll,
And wander'd with a shepherd guide,
Into the glades and moorlands wide
Bordering the forest : pausing here
She bade him on his way return—

“Shepherd,” said she, “God give thee cheer;
May thy life flourish like the fern,
And all good fortune thee betide,
As thou hast spoken sooth to me.”
“Lady,” said he, “my tongue ne’er lied :
Within yon forest that we see,
The Woodcutter doth aye abide,
Alone, with one friend—Industry;
A man, ’tis thought, whose former days
Were pass’d in war and courtly ways,
But fallen now to poverty.”

The shepherd left her, and she gazed
Upon the solitude around,
Then upward to the heavens, amazed—
So dark the sky, so bright the ground!
Mid-way in air, a cloud-pile dun
Hung heavy as a tomb of death;
Behind it beam’d the noon-tide sun
That shone upon the fields beneath.
Above, a leaden smouldering gloom,

Impervious to the eye as doom;
While, underneath, the landscape lay
In pure light, near and far away;
Though still in shadow Hulda stood
Fronting that cloud beside the wood.

Intent she look'd upon that cloud,
Then turn'd aside, amid the shade,
Into a forest-path o'erbrow'd
By boughs that frowning arches made.
The green lights of the distant glade
Glanced thro' the trunks in their dark crowd,
But soon the sombre foliage wound
A soft and general gloom around,
And in the forest depths she heard,
With heart that flutter'd like a bird,
A woodman's measured blows resound.

She hurried onward with a bound,
Yet sometimes stopp'd as if in fear,
Until the axe with ringing sound

Told that the arm which smote was near.
She paused before a thicket-gap,
Grasping green tangles in her hand,
And heard a huge trunk's creaking snap,
And saw its down-crash'd boughs expand
O'er the moss'd ground, while close beside
The Woodman stood, and deeply sigh'd,
Leaning upon his ponderous axe.

"Fallen forest lord!" said he, "the racks
Of threatening cloud and hissing rain—
The gusts and tosses of the wind—
The lightning with its blast and blain—
Red sun-glare withering, snow-storm froze—
Shall vex and waste thy strength no more;
And thou for ever wilt be laid
At rest, beyond the hopes that fade—
Thou lofty melancholy shade.
Oh, like my fortunes, once so high,
Thy foliage waved in the blue sky;
Now broken—scattered utterly—
On the cold earth they wait to die!"

The Woodman felt a gentle hand
Placed o'er his lips, while accents bland
And sweet as heavenly music, spake—
“ Ah, wouldst thou, then, my true heart break
And wouldst thou thus desert the love
Of Hulda, and neglect to prove
Her never-shaken constancy,
That waited but a breath from thee?
My lord, beyond the woods, a train
Attend thy coming—wilt thou deign
To go with us to Lindenforst,
Where thou wilt find what thou had'st lost?
For Sonnenfels—yea, every soul—
Hath placed itself at my control.
For thy loved sake became they mine,
And all of us, dear lord, are thine.”

“ Sweet One,” said he, “ thine eyes are swim-
ming,

Or do my tears confuse thy face?

Is it a dream my sense bedimming,
Or do I see thee in this place?

I feel thy presence, oh, sweet wife!
Filling these woods with loving breath;
Yet, may it be my passion's life
Hath call'd a vision up from death.
Can it be true?—and shalt thou be
My heart's wife in reality?
My soul's wife to eternity?
Oh, let me dream, or clearly see!
Hulda—my Hulda, speak to me!"

She could not speak. The sun-set beams
Stole through the foliage soft as dreams,
Such as he fear'd, yet felt so sweet,
And grass grew golden at their feet.
A whispering ran through all the leaves,
Of joyous tumult—hushing bliss—
And gleam with shade a net-work weaves,
Till lost in one commingling kiss.
The sun hath sunk in melting light,
But love hath rapturous inward sight.
Their early life and course of love,

Hopes, fears, and each eventful scene,
Like visions through their memories move,
And fade—ah, have they really been ?
The future and the past conjoin,
Making the present dream divine :
And now the birds their evening hymn
Sing round them, while the woods grow dim.

Love claimeth here his perfect hour :
There,—ends the date of sceptred power,
And all its earth. The ambitious king
To one great battle marshalling
His force, doth on one desperate blow
Risk all his worldly weal or woe.
His army, weaken'd since he lost
The vassal powers of Lindenforst,
With those of Sonnenfels now joined,
And by love's dearest bonds combined,
Was doomed,—although he would not see
The Emperor's certain victory.
At Marchfeld did the armies meet,

And, in a slaughterous wild retreat,
King Ottocar was smitten down,
And lost at once both life and crown.
Thus was the ancient prophecy
Accomplish'd,—by no magic high,
But simply, as a bird doth fly.

The halls of Lindenforst are ringing
With shouts and music, joy and singing;
Their Lady hath return'd, and brought
Him that they loved, and she had sought
In forest glooms ; already he
Held o'er their hearts true sovereignty.
“ Forward to Sonnenfels !” they cry ;
“ Sir Ludolf strength and peace can bring,
And of Bohemia shall be king !”

The Emperor hath this message sent
“ Unto the high and valiant knight,
Sir Ludolf, we the settlement
Of feuds commit, and every right.

Bohemia's crown within his hand
We place, and to his care commend."

At once the crown Sir Ludolf placed
On Otto's head, and gently graced
By praying that the Princess fair
His royal throne and bed would share ;
Since that his brief adversity
Would teach him truth and clemency.

The towers of Sonnenfels are gleaming
In noon-tide rays with banners streaming !
A glittering herald on a height
Crieth anon, with joy and might ;
" I see a train upon the hills
Come sparkling down beside the rills !
They pass into the groves of fir ;—
Dark greenness hides—they reappear,
Brighter than ever !—man and horse
Seem larger grown !—they bend their course,
Gallantly, graciously, gay as flowers,
Nodding, and pointing towards our towers !

Ludolf with Hulda !—side by side
Smiling!—in front of all they ride !
Bless the Lord Christ, and these good hours !”

On Ludolf's happy bridal eve
While feast, song, dance, and pleasure fill'd
His rock-built halls, the lovers leave
The throng; by dreamy passion thrill'd,
Which could not bear the sounding mirth—
'Twas heartfelt, yet too much of earth.

Silent they move ; their way they take
Down to the cave beside the lake,
And soft and slow with arms embracing
Along the margin are they pacing,
And think amidst their rapturous tears
Of former bliss and pains and fears.
And while they stand near that dear cave
They hear afar a chorus sung—
Remember'd well; it seem'd the grave
Gave up the beauty hidden long
Its sad and secret shades among.

“ Bring from Bohemia’s woods and bowers
Chaplets, wreaths, and odorous flowers,
Ivy rock-grown in soft rains,
The purple crocus from the plains,
Scented sprigs o’ the dark green fir,
Fresh from the sparkling mountain air,
With lilies white and azure bells
Cull’d in the deep Moravian dells;
But, oh ! from Love’s own garden sweet
Strew roses round the happy feet,
And weave in garlands for the bed
Of Hulda, who this day hath wed
Sir Ludolf, Knight of Sonnenfels:
Pray for them while the chorus swells.”

THE
MONK OF SWINESHEAD ABBEY:

A Ballad Chronicle
OF
THE DEATH OF KING JOHN.

“ Begyn monke, sayde y^e kyng. And y^e monke dranke a great draught, and toke the kyng the cuppe, and y^e kyng dranke also a great draught, and set down the cuppe. The monke anone ryghte wente into the farmerye, and there dyed, anone, on whose soule God have mercy. Amen. And blessed monkes syng for his soul specially, and shall whyle y^e Abbaye standeth.”

The Cronycle of Englonde, with the Fruyte of Tymes, compyled in a Boke, and also enprynted by One, sometime Scolemayster of saynt Albons, upon whose soule God have mercy. Amen.

The following Ballad is founded upon the above Chronicle by Caxton, reprinted by Wynkyn de Worde, in Flete St., 1520. The same story is told in “Grafton’s Chronicle” of some half a century later date, with a few circumstantial variations, which appear to have no other authority than the fancy of the veteran chronicler.

THE
MONK OF SWINESHEAD ABBEY.

AGAINST the door-post of his barn
 Stood the burly Farmer of Oakland Vale:
O'er distant fens was heard a horn,
 But here the thump of the whirling flail:
Two Monks from Swineshead, shaven and shorn,
 Sat fronting him upon a rail;
One glowed with holy zeal and scorn—
 Shady the other's face, and pale.

The Farmer's brow waxed red and bold,
 And into a corn-bin he thrust his staff:
Said he, " This grain springs from the mould;
 Lives—does its work—and comes to draff:

So do our bodies, we oft are told;
Yet even monks must eat and quaff:
If we're but stragglers from death's fold,
Be merry, meantime, while harvests laugh.

“I say, father Andrew, the worth of corn
Is highest of all things on the earth;
For wherefore should a man be born
If his life ended with his birth?
He, to continue, must have life's food,
Or holiness would feel the dearth;
No church can float upon watery blood,
Tho' prayers be'nt measured by our girth.”

“Profane of tongue,” the monk rejoined—
The bright-eyed monk with the shining brow
“Heaven's harvest-light is but purloined,
Which ripens the fields of such as thou.
Know, that the church is—first and last—
The all-in-all upon this earth;
The corporal food of ages past
Is, like our bodies, nothing worth,

And present food all turns to froth,
From Nature's deep springs upward cast.
But each immortal soul hath roots
Within creation's base and scheme,
While all the shells and husks of worlds
Float down annihilation's stream."

Again was heard the horn afar,
But nearer than before:
The Farmer, listening, gazed around,
Then thought of it no more;
But Andrew his high homily
Resumed, until right moodily,
His words the Farmer bore.

"Thus ends the body, and its cares—
Food, raiment, worldly good—
Thus lives the soul, when past all fears,
Enshrined beyond time's flood.
Our church the temple is of souls,
Preparing them for flight,
Choosing the purest—while dark shoals

It banishes to endless night.
Beware, lest evil spirits prevail!"
"I will," quoth the farmer of Oakland Vale.

Hereat, the quiet Father Luke,
Of life devout well known,
Smiled placidly, but ere he spake
There came a sudden moan
Of voices from the village near,
Which seemed of sorrow and of fear.
The news had reached them that the King
Had all his army lost,
Drowned on the sands, while at full speed
Himself had scarcely crossed.

Along the washes, where the sands
Of Lincolnshire unite
With those of Norfolk, would he pass
Although 'twas nearly night;
And of the tides he nothing knew,
Nor thought, unless with spite.
Onward he sped—his army came

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Behind with baggage train,
And treasures which from churches rich
And abbeyes he had ta'en.
When all were midway, the tide turned,
And with a sullen roar
Swiftly in rows of fierce white fangs
Came rolling in a-shore!
Men, horses, treasure, baggage, gold,
They never were seen more.

“ These fighting men, these soldier men,”
Quoth Father Andrew gravely,
“ Follow their fate—or meet with it;
Slay, or are slaughtered bravely;
But here hath God with sudden hand
Snatched the King’s army from the land.
Where now is all their pampered blood,
Their full-fed, gaudy power?
Corn-fields were wasted on the flesh
Which kites will soon devour.
Of man’s base bodily claims, thou churl,
By this be warned, in timely hour.”

Hereat the Farmer waxed so wroth
His speech he could not hold:
“Show us,” he cried, “a heavenly path
Without one clod of mould!
Then show us a foot to tread it, monk;
This path not bought nor sold;
A path for a man where an angel sings—
For a mortal man, who hath no wings,—
Make plain this riddle old.
I listen unto Father Luke,
Whether he chant or preach;
And see I can, the truth like a man;
But you confuse what he doth teach.
Is the soul a devil that ye should make
The body a torment for its sake,
Or treat it like sheer dirt,
When God gave both to make up one,
Like motion to the moon or sun—
Like feeling to the heart.”

Now Father Andrew rose, with hand
Cast high, and prophet mien;

But also Father Luke arose,
And gently stepp'd between.
Said he, " Good brother Andrew, bear,
As our Great Master bore,
Rough words without retort, for love
Wins those who scoff'd before.
I know thy zeal; this Farmer's truth
Of feeling, eke I know;
Where both are right, why disagree—
Nay, brothers, do not so.
The church of Christ stands on a hill,
The highest—and our only trust;
From its pure fountains do we fill
Our souls, and pacify our thirst:
Life's highest thing—but not the first.
For life itself is first of all,
The medium of our prayers,
The ease and servant of the soul
Through all its joys and tears.
And, while on earth, this ease must be
Kept sound, or else 'twere better dead;

Therefore, before the church or soul,
A corn-field stands—and bows its head.”

Ere Andrew could reply there rang
The shrill sound of the horn,
And close at hand, a war-worn band,
With raiment soil'd and rusted brand,
Came with the King forlorn.

Peevish and child-like hung his mouth,
Oft uttering strangest sound;
And tags and buttons off he twitched
And cast upon the ground.
Not only was his Majesty
Forlorn, but snappish and irate,
Like a young crocodile, just hatched—
And on a mill-stone down he sate.

“Pull off my boots, thou Farmer churl!
—Ods blood! not so!” cried he;
But Father Andrew quick stepped forth,
And on his bended knee,

Drew off the wet boots that had grieved
His sacred Majesty.

“ A cup of ale!”—at once ’twas brought:

“ *Taste*, some one—Farmer, thou!

The farmer tasted: said King John,

“ Thy trust is in the plough !

So is not mine, in anything,

Nor any one, I vow !”

King John then cursed his foes the French,

The English, too, cursed he;

The French because they fought so hard,

The English for disloyalty.

“ On both befall death’s blight and bale !”

Cried he, and drank the creamy ale;

And then he cursed the sea!

“ Now tell me, monks, for well ye know

By shrift and secret ear;

Are all my subjects false to me,

And nought but rebels must I see

Around your abbey, far and near?”

Said Father Andrew, "They are all
As loyal as may be;
The apple of the church's eye
Is John's anointed majesty."
Out spake the Farmer, "Well they love
Their country and their king,
For crops this year be mainly good,
And corn gives bread and ale for food,
Which makes the belly sing.
Singeth the belly, sings the brain,
'Tis ever thus with me;
Contentment springs up with the grain,
And so doth honesty."

The King he laugh'd a bitter laugh,
And quoth he, "The Monk did lie,
For this Farmer saith my subjects' love
Is bred of gluttony.
Methinks it *is*—too well they feed—
Corn is too plenteous and too cheap—
Let each man who eats bread take heed,
A harvest of the truth I'll reap.

Those who love John with hungry maws

Must needs be loyal born,

Whom to find out I'll make new laws,

Shall double the price of corn.

My forest fences, dikes, and mounds

All level shall be made;

My deer shall wander where they list,

And browse the young green blade."

All stared dismayed, save Father Luke,

Who stood before the King,

And with a sweet voice bade him think

Of those beneath his wing:

"For as a bird with many young

That careth for them all,

A King should ever wakeful be

Lest evil them befall,

Nor like a fowler spread a net

Which may their lives enthrall."

"You think so:"—musing, said the King—

"Ah,—none but monks should trap and fleece;

The truth from famished men I'll wring,
Love then will be a moral thing—
Thou Monk of Swineshead Abbey, peace!"

The King arose, and went to dine
At Swineshead on that day,
And Father Andrew's words divine
Burst forth like sparkling spray.
His indignation rolled like waves
Against the King's intent;
He swore by all the martyrs' graves,
By patriarchs' garments rent,
That cruel was this starving scheme,
As cruel as might be—
"And something more," said Father Luke—
"It strikes at Heaven's decree,
Which hath provided food enough
For human industry."
Whereto did holy Andrew add
A long and learned prayer;
The Farmer and his men knelt down,
And called on Jesu there;

But Luke, although he also knelt,
Was silent as the air.

The Abbey bell has rung its chime,
And to dinner the King hath gone,
All with the Abbot in portly state
To quaff the foaming horn;
While a crowd outside the steaming hall
Snuff up the venison gale,
And hear the King laugh loud and call
For more hot cakes and ale.
But another crowd outside the wall
Make many a moan and wail;
Men and women, with looks forlorn,
Have heard of the laws against cheap corn.

Foremost among them at the gate
Was the Farmer of Oakland Vale:
The sun shone bright on his flaxen pate,
And his ruddy visage hale.
To pray the King to forego this wrong,
With a good bold speech came he,

And he said it out loud, to make quite sure
It was right, and in memory.

While yet he spake the Monks came forth,
Andrew and thoughtful Luke,
And Andrew with a warning air
His right hand waved and shook:
Said he, "The King within these walls
Good rest and solace finds;
Your murmurs, most unseemly, show
Your discontented minds."

"We mean they should," the Farmer said;
"Fool!" whisper'd Andrew, "cease!
Or thou mayst rue it on the block:
Retire, with all these geese."
Then loud again the Monk resumed,
"Fast—pray—depart in peace!"

"But then, these laws," the Farmer said,
"To double the price of corn?"
Quoth Andrew, "Of John's majesty
The subjects ye are born;
Beware! 'tis thy gross body speaks,—

A cry from dirt and dust,
The sensual appetite that craves,
In place of Heaven and Trust.
Oh, banish all these greedy cares,
And pray to each pure Saint
To keep the casket of the soul
Sacred from sensual taint.
To eat is lawful; but man's bread
Needeth our Law's restraint."

"Chop off my head!" the Farmer cried,
"But first my tongue must speak!
Truth is for ever—Nature's truth—
What is man's life?—a week!
So preached good Father Luke last eve,
In words as strong as meek.
Ye say the body should be held
Sacred from taint or hurt,
Yet do ye give it all vile names—
What is this sacred dirt?
But live somehow the body must,
And as a body should,

A good stout servant—and not dust,
While full of true heart's blood.
Therefore I say, with Father Luke,
Corn grew before man built a church,
And souls like birds sang in the trees,
Ere they were caged and made to perch.
Therefore I say, till crops have fair play,
Endow no abbey nor saintly shrine,
For if it be built upon famine and guilt,
'Tis black as a bean-stack, and nought divine."

Out spake the King, with an angry voice,
And forth from the gate stept he:
"Why gather these peasants here to brawl,
And who may their spokesman be?"
Whereat the crowd slunk back each man,
With a face of awe and ruth;
The Farmer forgot every word of his speech,
And gaped with his great red mouth.

"Thou Farmer churl!" now spake King John,
"A chain and gag for thee;

Thy rebel sayings have been told;

Thy head shall forfeit be!"

Then the King mused within himself—

"'Tis plain monk Andrew sees,

The Abbot, now made Bishop, he

Might pray on Abbot's knees.

His loyal service shall proceed—

I'll test him by degrees;

And quiet Luke, of holy life,

Meantime lord Abbot made—

Ay, ay, he'll do—an old cracked fife,

A mouldering tombstone shade!"

With passive mien and steady eye,

Luke stood before the King,

And prayed him not to make new laws

Which would poor subjects wring.

Said he, "Great plenty given by God

Is for man's need and use,

And wouldst thou blight the heaven-sent crop,

And nature's smile abuse?"

"No more of this," said John, "I mean

To make thee Abbot soon
Of Swineshead Abbey; therefore, monk,
Sing thou some other tune."

"Great is the charge, and manifold,
Thou lay'st on me, O King;
But greater burthens these hard laws
Will to thy conscience bring.
Brief are our days—a little while
With brightness and with shade,
We are in motion—then quite still,
And covered with a spade.
A windy roar—with calms between—
Then into nothing do we fade.
Like to the cloud upon the hill
We are a minute seen,
Or shadow of the windmill's sails
Across yon sunny slope of green.
Therefore, be merciful, O King!
Within thy little span,
And recognise with tender heart
Thy suffering fellow man."

John mused awhile upon his boot,
And with its heel he made,
Unconsciously, a sullen trench—
Then covered it—and said,
“Luke, thou art free—too free of speech,
’Tis not mine hour to shrive;
But thou, methinks, wilt better preach
Ere long—as all new Abbots strive.”
So saying, with a scornful soul,
The King return’d to brim his bowl.

In a deep cell beneath the walls
Of Swineshead Abbey old,
Stout Oakland’s Farmer, gagged and chained,
Sat in the darkness cold.
He turned it over in his mind,
Like to a quaint carved cup,
How being right should seem all wrong—
And then he gave it up.
Man’s body must be fed, he felt,
And God gave corn, he knew,—
And King John took God’s corn away,

Because too fast it grew.
 And then he thought of axe and block,
 And twitched his neck awry;
 And fancied in the dark he saw
 A headless trunk reel by!
 Then of his soul he strove to think,
 But nought of that he knew,
 Save what he'd learnt from Father Luke—
 "O Lord! my heart is true!"
 Thus did he pray, in gag and chain,
 "O Lord! my heart is true!"

"Good friends," said Andrew to the throng
 That still lurked round the gate,
 "We must submit to Providence
 Whate'er may be our state;
 For in the midst of gladness, we
 Are oft cast down with sorrow,
 And crops, like hopes, most rich to-day,
 Are blighted on the morrow.
 And such is human life, my sons,
 Exulting, then dejected;

For good and ill ride on the wind,
And come when least expected.
Return unto your homes forthwith,
And we will pray for ye,
Already our loved Father Luke
Is praying inwardly."

Now Andrew dropt his outspread arms,
As folds a rook his wings;
The heart-sick peasantry went home
In wonder at all things!
Andrew retired within his cell
His flesh to mortify,
And as he took the scourge, he said,
"Luke is an older man than I—
'Tis just that he be Abbot now,
And my ambition, meantime, die."

Amidst the cloister's chilly shade
Luke paced and paused alone,
And oft sighed deep, and set his back
Against a shaft of stone.

The cruel laws to grind the weak,
And waste God's bounteous food,—
Corroded in his human heart,
And poison'd its clear blood.
In thought he look'd around for aid,
Some means to save the poor,
Who from this plague of royal law
Had want and death in store;
And he saw nought but Labour's Sons
Begging from door to door.
No banded hearts with strength and hope,
No knowledge, power, or gold,
No eloquence, no energies,
No might by thousands told;
But Famine, throned upon a mill,
'Midst corn-fields: one man's scoffing will!

Now, with the Devil, with Mercy now,
He wrestled, groan by groan,
Until at last those twain joined hands,
And changed to a tombstone.

Yet Mercy from the reeking grave

Cried out, "I still have won!"

Luke clasped his hands—sank on his knees—

And slowly said, "It shall be done!"

'Twas willed, 'twas planned—a deed was done

Which never can be done again,

In lands where despotism long since

Was buried with its rusty chain,

And barbarous age and ignorance

O'er thought and speech no longer reign.

A single will was once life's law

And death's, because it wore a crown;

Yet fate wrought fairly, for e'en then

A single will could put it down.

Now doth Opinion, multiplied

By thousands and by millions, take

The world along, and tyrannies,

Like sands from out an hour-glass, shake.

Slowly, surely, moves the mass,

With so deep pressure, weight, and pain,

As leaves indented in the earth

Marks that no wheels need touch again.
 It was not thus when King John swore
 To double the price of God's free grain.

"Your most illuminated word,
 And blessed crown," the Abbot said,—
 Pressing one hand below his breast,
 And bowing tow'rds the King his head,—
 "Must be obeyed; and I accept—
 Though, by mine humbleness, unwilling,
 The mitre—to you, Sire, and God,
 My duty thus fulfilling."

"That's well—very well," the King replied,
 "And here comes the Abbot I name in your
 place,—
 Solemn old Luke—a monk without pride—
 (He is not long-lived, to judge by his face)
 Ho! hither, Monk! all good thee betide,
 And heaven with thy fortune send prudence
 and grace."

“Unto your Majesty,” said Luke,

With grateful reverence,

“The same good favours may God grant,

And all beneficence;

But most of all, great Sir, I pray

In heart and soul, to see

That these new laws against the poor

May change to charity.”

“Why pest and plague mine ear, Sir Monk,

With this same raven tone?

Disloyal people shall be proved

By want: liege subjects will not groan.

New forests and new laws I’ll have,

Corn fields shall scarcer be,

My traitorous Baron’s lands I’ll make

One greenwood revelry.

Call forth my guards!—to London now—

Tis time that we were gone,

There will be many a head, I trow,

Endanger’d ere the morn.

I have slept well, and feasted well,

Fresh strength returns to me,
And spirits fresh from downy bed,
And last night's wassail glee."

"But ere your Majesty depart,"—

With alter'd mien and voice, said Luke,
As though full twenty heavy years
Time had swept off with shepherd-crook,
So that a young monk he did look—
"Ye once again will glad your heart
With our good abbey's cheer,
And our soul-saving benison
Take with thee far and near."

"Good cheer and parting benison!

Well thought on!" quoth the King;
"I see an Abbotship will soon
Luke to his senses bring;
So froth me up your spicy ale,
We'll quaff; and then take wing."

Forth went a monk to fetch the ale;

The King cried, "To the brim,
Froth it up!" "To the brim," said Luke—

So saying, followed him.

The Abbot old and all the Monks

With blessings gathered round,

And prayed for John a long, long life,

And slumbers sweet and sound.

"I slept well," quoth the King, "last night,

And never deeper, sweeter,

And yet I dreamt I flew through air,

No arrow e'er was fleetier;

And, dreaming, saw all golden sights,

Of harvests and of plenty,

Enough in every single year

To last the world for twenty.

All this was strange at such a time !

I woke—they scarce would fade—

Oons! it *was* strange—and once, methought,

I pass'd a grave new made.

But 'twas all nought—though now, indeed,

It doth remind me well

Of that same Farmer, chained below,
Whose head we'll chop off ere we go—

'Twas *that* my dreaming did foretel."

But here's the ale!—move faster, monk,

Not with that funeral pace;

Nor thou, Sir Luke, slow following,

Bring me a churchyard face.

Destruction to our enemies!

Obey my laws, or die!—

Nay—some one drink first of the cup—

No loving trust have I."

And Luke stepp'd forward—slowly drank—

And then return'd it with a sigh.

"Thou hast good need to take thy breath,

After a draught so steady and deep!

With dry bones and marrow like alder pith,

I thought in thine old veins no blood could leap!

Thine health, Father Luke! hear what thy King
saith—

Thou hast gotten thine Abbotship safely and
cheap;

We fancied thee near the day of thy death,

But a harvest of fat years I see thou'lt reap!
 By that draught inaugural thou hast ta'en,
 Fresh spirits and health are in store for thee;
 The omen is good—here's to thee again!

When next we make merry 'twill be rare glee:
 Thy lean ribs will plump then, and pant amain——
 Thy hollow face changes!—why look'st thou
 at me?

Thine eye makes me dizzy,—oh! what is this
 pain?—

'Tis poison!—call hither—oh, treachery!
 Luke, help me!—thine eye lights a fire in my
 brain!"

Luke hasten'd to the frantic King,
 And caught him ere he fell,
 And gently placed him on the ground
 With looks no tongue can tell.

And meekly, with an inward groan,
 Knelt down beside him there,
 And loosed his vest, and bathed his lips,
 While all the rest stood, pale as stone,

Before John's mad despair.
But presently the King grew dumb,
And motionless, and black,
And, like some image terrible,
Lay glaring on his back!
From monk to monk he look'd with eye
Like to a burning coal—
So Luke arose, and pray'd aloud,
Till the eyes ceased to roll,
And tears gush'd down John's livid cheeks,
Like mercy to his soul.
That body, gross with recent feast,
On the stone floor lay panting,
Fainter and fainter, while soft lights
Came through the window slanting.
With folded arms across his breast,
Luke stood beside, and pray'd:
The dying visage understood—
And answered, shade by shade.

“ All-knowing, all-directing God!
In whom we move and live,

Our thoughts, and works, and empty days,
And careless wrongs, forgive;
But most in need the cruel heart
That breeds the conscious wrong,
And cares not for the consequence
To helpless old and young.
Some wilful deeds are perfect crimes,
And some less wicked are,
Because 'twas meant that good should spring
Beneath the baleful star.
Yet, of all sinful beings, most
In need of mercy those,
Who, having power much good to do,
All goodness would oppose,
And turn Heaven's bounteous gifts to gall,
And Nature's smiles to blows."

Luke paused awhile, and o'er his cheek
There passed a quivering gleam—
And then in darkness settled there,
While he, with yet more fervent air,
Resumed his solemn theme.

“ Therefore I humbly pray for one
 Now closing his brief span,
 Who had—as all too often have—
 Forgotten God and man!
 He hath most deeply felt his crime,
 Deeply repented too;
 Years have flashed through his dying brain—
 He separates the false and true.
 Ye saw those tears—they were far more
 Than drops of anguish streaming;
 They were a pitiful sweet dew,
 With heavenly sweetness gleaming.
 Christ o’er him bendeth from the air,
 Receiving his last sighs;
 See! he departs!—I cannot—friends—
 Will no one close his eyes?
 Dear brothers! pray for all his sins—
 He made the blessed sign,
 As I do, now—pray for his sins—
 And, oh! *pray, too, for mine !”*

Beside the dead King sank down Luke,

And instantly expired!
The monks aghast stood mutely there
Long time ere they retired.
Stout Oakland's Farmer, now set free,
Stared up at the blue sky,
And Andrew soon was Abbot made,
And smiled benignantlly.

THE
THREE KNIGHTS OF CAMELOTT.

A Fairy Tale.

THE

THREE KNIGHTS OF CAMELOTT.

FILL high the massy bowl of wine,
And drink unto Sir Palmerine,
 To Arthur, Ban, and Bors!
And strong Saint George, long since in tomb,
With Champions bold of Christendom,—
 Their wassails and their wars!

The hunters and the winding horn,
Sir Tristram rising with the morn,
 And stern King Pellinore;
The mighty Launcelot with spear
Unfailing in the fierce career,
 Or 'gainst the tusked boar.

Let tabor blithe and bugle sound
Unto King Arthur's table round,—
All valiant hearts I wot;—
Drink in thy spirit's lusty glee,
And pledge with fullest jollity
The Knights of Camelott.

Three noble hearts of this strong band
Have travell'd to a distant land,
And on their meadows green,
Where ancient lords and ladies gay
Witness the rush of fierce tourney,
They are no longer seen.

Oh, there was many a lady's eye
Once glancing on them brilliantly,
Now full of glimmering tears;
And many a knight whose plates of mail
Had echoed with their strong assail
Now rid him of his fears.

The younger, hight Sir Amorel—
A lover gay, and, sooth to tell,
He loved not oft in vain;
For he both generous was and brave,
Full rich in dress, and never grave,
But sweetly told his pain.

His doublet was of violet hue,
And glistened with the morning dew;
His helm of emerald bright;
And round his waist a diamond zone,
Like a far constellation shone,
With scintillating light.*

A wreath of lilies round his neck
Hung loosely tangling o'er his back,
All robed in carmine clear,
Whose broidered roses glanced like fire;
While in his hand with sportive ire
He shook a silver spear!

* The fairy fashion of these accoutrements is after the manner of Chaucer's fragment of "Sire Thopas."

A gorgeous pheasant plume he wore,
An ivory shield he lightly bore,
 With figures carved thereon;
Venus, Adonis,—Helen fair,
Paris;—and Dian, too, was there,
 With pale Endymion.

His saddle pommel wore a stone
That like a freakful glow-worm shone;
 His palfrey proud did go,
With coat all pied and colour sheen,
Like the sweet blossom of the bean
 In drops of jet and snow.

The second was Sir Leontine;
Ne'er was a bolder heart than thine
 On direful battle plain;
The shade of victory in the air
Sang to the passage of thy spear,
 Like whispers o'er the slain.

A glittering coat of mail he wore
Of steel, with diamonds sprinkled o'er;
 A helm of burnished gold;
With nodding plume of purest white
That down his plated shoulders bright
 In snowy volume roll'd.

A sea-waved velvet housing flow'd
Adown his courser's flanks, yet show'd
 The limbs of graceful swell,
Like to a chesnut's clear, bright brown,
Burst from its green and prickly crown,
 And fallen in the dell.

His shield was gold of richest ore,
And, blood-red, in its centre bore
 The head of chanticleer,
That seemed to fill with flashing eye
And glowing crest, all turret high,
 The very woods with fear.

His bridle was of pearl'd japan;
His saddle white cornelian,
 With trappings silver bell'd;
His spurs were golden, rough and red
Like star-fish, and above his head
 A shining sword he held.

The third he hight Sir Galohault,
A stern old knight as e'er did vault
 Upon a mailed steed;
With arm that like death's sceptre fell,
And calm, unconquerable will
 In perilous time of need.

A suit he wore of iron mail,
Well overlaid with bar and nail;
 A massy iron helm,
Whose solemn-nodding eoally plume
Roll'd heavy, as a cloud of gloom
 That would the fields o'erwhelm.

A tall black steed, all lightning-eyed,
Like that which Merlin once did ride

I' the Battle of the Kings,
With grave demeanour he bestrode,
And silently and slow it glode
As though on airy wings.

Full long these Knights have travell'd far
In search for enterprise of war

Upon a distant shore,
And many a valiant deed and just
Hath each achieved nor shall the rust
Of ages soil them o'er.

The birds rose up while yet 'twas night,
And sang to hurry on the light—

Full soon the morning breaks;
To greet the sun, fresh leaves and flowers
Open their hearts in fields and bowers,
And man their joy partakes.

Into a forest they rode along,
That echoed with the wood-lark's song,
And blackbird loud in bush,
Whose yellow bill prolonged the strain,
And lectured every grove again,
Till evening's gentle hush.

The goldfinch, with his fiery face,
The little Mars of feather'd race,
Trill'd forth a challenge brief;
While swell'd his cheeks in fullest bloom
Of burning gold and velvet gloom,
Like to the wall-flower's leaf.

But soon the Knights wild joyance hear
Of rougher music piping near
Among the forest trees,—
Of reed and timbrel, mad with glee,
And frequent shouts of jollity
Loud dancing on the breeze.

And now beneath an oak they spied
A hairy Satyr, drunken-eyed,
With Pan-pipes loose in hold,
And laughing face as red as wine,
And paunch as heavy as a vine,
While on the grass he roll'd.

“ Oh, laugh ye there, and pipe ye there,
With breath as hot as summer air?”

Quoth gay Sir Amorell;
“ Methinks thou hast a jovial time
From lark-rise unto evening chime,
And bear'st life's journey well.”

“ Ho! Knight,” the vinous Satyr said,
“ A life of joy I've ever led;
I swear it by my horns!
Pastime we find in sun or shade,
Rifle a vineyard—steal a maid,
And punish her proud scorns.

“ Wild dancing, quoiting, song, and sleep,
Fill up the rest; but take ye keep

Where all our pain begins,
For we are ever doom'd to wear”
(He sily grinned) “ these coats of hair,
In penance for our sins!”

“ And say ye so,” quoth Leontine,
“ Thou steal'st the virgin, stripp'st the vine,
And laughing talk'st of pain?”
The Satyr answered not a word,
But like a well-fed jolly bird
To piping fell again.

“ Where keep ye all the ladies fair?”
Quoth Amorell, and shook his spear;
But still the Satyr plied
His merry pipes with louder peal,
Till sharp and sudden he doth feel
The javelin pierce his side.

Fierce was his goat's face to behold,
And red as burns the marigold
Upon its verdant bed!
Then up he sprang and hoof'd the mound,
Dash'd wild his wood-pipes on the ground,
And yelling, madly fled!

“And follow we, and follow we!”
Cried Leontine with ardent glee,—
The Knights then spurr'd their steeds;
“To free bright maids from thieves like these,
We'll chase the Satyr thro' the trees,
And track him as he bleeds.”

Then close they follow'd thro' the wood,
And leap'd the dyke and swam the flood,
Till loud again they hear
The broken song, the laughing shout,
As of some Bacchanalian rout
In echoes far and near.

The Satyr scrambled on before,
Headlong through trunks and thickets tore,
Oft looking back with ire!
Till soon they reach'd a lawny plain
Where damsels bound with osier chain,
Were ranged in drooping quire.

And crowds of Satyrs, old and young,
Were dancing in a drunken throng;
While some, with glee obscene,
On tufted hoofs were bounding high,
Spinning their timbrels soundingly,
Then rolling on the green.

And loud the Pandean pipes were blown,
Of shrill, or full-deep mellow tone,
From cheeks of swollen red;
And some, close to their hairy breast,
Within their rugged arms oft press'd
The pale and loathing maid.

Some quoitèd; others form'd a ring
To quaff the goblet, or to sing;
Some fought, and tugged long beards;
Some gazing sat on grassy knoll,
While oft a massy oaken bowl
Came whizzing at their heads!

Within a fresh green copse afar,
Sir Amorell a lady saw,
Right lovely to behold;
Who beckon'd with sweet looks of sadness,
'Then wrung her hands in eager madness!
Ah, could his heart be cold?

Intent upon the laughing rout,
Sir Galohault descried her not,
Nor bold Sir Leontine,
But Amorell, with fond surprise,
Gazed on the beauty of her eyes,
Like far-off stars divine.

He prick'd his courser's flanks amain,
And swiftly cross'd the charmed plain,
As buoyant as the wind;
And soon he breathed a balmy air,
And sate him by the lady fair,
Nor thought of friends behind.

His steed he left to roam at will,
And on his knees he gently fell,
So fair she was to see;
When as he strove her hand to greet,
She bent, and gave him kisses sweet—
But not a word spake she.

And as he sat beside her there,
With fingers tangled in her hair,
A second lady came,
More bright and lovely to his view,
All clad in robes of clouded blue,
Zoned with a ruby's flame.

In silence on her face he gazed,
With visage moveless and amazed;
But soon his heart rose high,
And love, divided, battled strong;
On each alternately and long
He fix'd his wavering eye.

Thus sitting, upward softly flows,
Like odour from the morning rose,
A music breathing faint;
And from embowering vines there tripp'd
A maiden, fresh and coral lipp'd,
A laughing woodland saint.

Her ivory bosom was o'erhung
With violets and vine tendrils long;
White robes around her fell;
But, ah! so loose and wildly flying,
The Zephyrs all for love were dying—
And so was Amorell!

He saw—and he could think no more—
He loved—he sigh'd;—when soon all four
 In gleesome gambols join'd:
Till Amorell entranced sank down
In dead sleep!—and like music flown
 They vanish'd in the wind!

Now leave we Amorell asleep,
By phantoms fair enchanted deep,
 And to the Knights return;
Who, pausing, view'd the crowded plain,
The laughers, and the captive chain,
 Who ever weep and mourn.

The limping Satyr gain'd the throng,
And show'd his wound, and told his wrong;
 They gather'd earnest round;
And ceased their dancing and their mirth,
And dropp'd their reeds and bowls to earth,
 And spurn'd the mossy ground.

Quoth Leontine, with ardent mien,
“Yon hairy rabble on the green
 ”Twere best at once to rout;
To free the captives from their woe—
But see!—they hasten tow’rds us now,
 With loud and furious shout!”

Wildly the Satyrs on the sward
Came bounding like a horned herd,
 With staves and knotty bones,
Wood-knives, and clubs, and leathern slings;
Hark! through the air already sings
 A volleying shower of stones!

It rattled on their polish’d mail,
And fell about in heavy hail!
 Onward they spurr’d apace:
Sir Leontine right eager flew,—
Soon met the foremost of the crew,
 And smote him in the face.

A second fell,—and soon a third,
Sharp cloven 'twixt the neck and beard,
 Bounced down without his head,
Which roll'd along, a shaggy ball,
And o'er its trunk a crowd did fall,
 So heedlessly they sped.

Upon his shield their clubs of thorn
Beat loudly, while with yells of scorn
 Each stony volley flies,
And oft they task their wildest force
To drag him downward from his horse
 With savage mouth and eyes!

Stern Galohault with truncheon strong
Now rode amidst the warring throng,
 And smote them headlong down;
Still urging on to where the chain
Of captive damsels wept in pain,
 As though their eyes would drown;

Till as more near he won his way,
He found athwart his passage lay
 A moat, both deep and wide;
Each on the opposing margin stands
With outstretch'd and imploring hands!
 In vain, he must abide.

When looking round he spied a way
That moat to pass without delay,
 Across a bridge of wood;
And call'd Sir Leontine aloud,
Who battled 'gainst the furious crowd,
 And scarcely them withstood.

He heard, but such his headstrong ire,
He scorn'd unconquering to retire,
 Though stronger grew the assail,
While oft before him there upsprang
Spears through the earth! and loudly rang
 Against his temper'd mail:

Till weary grown, he turn'd to find
 Sir Galohault—when swift as wind
 Before him there arose
 An armed Knight in shadowy mail,
 On flame-eyed charger, tall and pale,
 The deadliest of his foes!

Yet paused he not, but spurr'd his steed,
 And the Knight's javelin as a reed
 He strongly put aside!
 And his good sword both horse and man
 Clove straightway thro',—as did King Ban,—
 They fell asunder wide!

Soon as the Shadow touch'd the ground
 It rose united, with a bound,
 And ran a fresh career;
 Again he cleft it through and through
 And swift again it upward grew,
 And threaten'd with its spear!

Thus wearied, soon around his head
The clubs redoubling fell like lead,—
The Satyrs shout and throng,
Till 'reft of strength his glaive to wield,
With dented helm and bloody shield
They drag him down headlong!

And o'er the fallen Knight full loud
They piped and raved, this wild-wood crowd,
And crumpled horns they blew;
With savage glee each goat's eye glares.
And, holding beards, they danced in pairs,
And flourish'd boughs of yew!

Torn and uprooted was the grass,
Where cloven hoofs had struggled fierce
In that unusual fray,
And o'er the plain they panting roll,
Where broken quoit and quarter'd bowl,
And doubled goblet lay.

Sir Galohault has ridden alone,
Unheeding either shout or groan,
Over the bridge to go;
And finds it guarded by a herd
Of savage dogs, as white as curd,
Or polar bears of snow.

Now flash'd the dark eye of his steed,
And bearing on, with trampling speed
He rush'd across the bridge!
Some were crush'd down, and some his glaive
Sent headless to the hissing wave,
So deadly was its edge.

Some, wounded, to the side were clinging,
And struggling upwards, grasping, swinging,—
The rest swam gaunt and grim,
Bedabbled o'er in foam and blood,
Or smothering 'neath the oozy mud,
Deep bedded round the brim.

He darted on!—when through the ground
Ten horsemen sprang, with sudden bound,
In armour midnight black!
'Midst them he rode with couchant spear,
And through them pass'd: in taunting jeer,
They vainly call him back.

Before his path bright virgins now
Came softly waving arms of snow;
And pray'd the Knight to stay;
And one, most lovely, him besought
There to alight—but Galohault
Still gallop'd on his way.

Though pass'd the bridge, he could not see
Where now the captive dames might be;
But soon his glances meet,
Slow moving o'er the enchanted meads,
A troop of dwarfs with goblin heads,
And fin-like hands and feet.

And in the distance stood on high
 A dusky castle gloomily,
 Like to a rocky cloud;
 But ere the Knight could gallop near,
 A croaking voice fell on his ear
 From that right ugly crowd.

“Return, oh, Knight! or thou shalt rue
 The hope thy madness doth pursue;
 ’Tis death to all who see;
 The owner of yon castle tall,
 Would straight devour thee, horse and all—
 He sleeps beneath yon tree!”

Sir Galohault he listen’d no more,—
 Swift o’er the plain his charger tore,
 Until the tree he gain’d;
 There lay a cumbrous Giant dreaming,
 His hot breath like an oven steaming;
 His beard with wine was stain’d!

His hair was like a lion's mane,
And shaggily bestrew'd the plain;
His limbs of hideous size:
Sir Galohault loud shouted forth,
"Giant awake!—awake thy wrath!"
He oped his moony eyes!

"Harrow thy heart!" the Giant said;
"Strong thunder leap upon thy head!
Why hast thou broke my sleep?
The browsing herds in pasture far,
Troop from the tiger's echoed roar,—
Why hast thou broke my sleep?"

The Knight, confronting his mad stare,
Spurr'd on, his sword upraised in air,
And one strong blow he sped,
Which, falling on the Giant's mane,
Turn'd off, or else had cleft in twain
His tawny tressed head.

The Giant rose!—with weighty force
Breasting the fury of the horse,
 And dealt a blow so true
From swinging mace, that the strong shock
Falling upon them like a rock,
 Both horse and man o'erthrew!

Their falling armour loudly rang
With iron jar and echoing clang,
 Upon the indented earth:
Arouse, Sir Knight! nor on the sward
Lie moveless, by thy fallen sword,
 Before a Giant's wrath!

Now as the monster stood to deal
A second stroke,—with flashing steel
 Sir Galohault arose!
And drove straight thro' the brawny side
His smoking glaive, in trenches wide,
 And follow'd strong his blows.

The mighty Giant gave a roar!
And, like the ocean's trembling floor,
 The earth shook far and near.
And he fell dead!—there, dark he lay,
As shadows of declining day,
 When tempest glooms the air.

Sir Amorell! Sir Leontine!
Where have ye slept, entranced, supine,
 Blind to the morning beams?
Lo! saved by guardian powers from death,
With wondering eyes ye issue forth,
 And meet like men in dreams!

When sank the conquer'd Knights, subdued
By charms of witchcraft, and by crowd
 Of Satyrs wild in war;
Good spirits shielded them from ill,—
And while they slept as marble still,
 Their coursers stray'd afar.

O'er marsh and mead, in gleesome speed,
Two youngling Satyrs rode the steed
Of sleeping Amorell;
Leontine's to a fire was sent—
The Satyrs, like a lobster, meant
To cook him in his shell.

But, ere the roaring fire was made,
A louder roaring shook the glade,—
'Twas of the giant slain;
And straightway all his minion band,
Satyr, and goblin, fled the land,
And ne'er return'd again.

Sir Leontine regain'd his steed,
As did Sir Amorell, soon freed
When fled that boisterous herd;
And tow'rds Sir Galohault with glee
Riding, they view where from a tree
Swung a grim head and beard.

All rode unto the castle wall,
And thronging from the marble hall
Did Lords and Ladies come;
From ugly dwarfs thus sudden changed,
'The Knights they thank'd, and round them
ranged,
To lead them through the dome.

And vassal trains were waiting there,
Who to the spacious table bear
The viands and the wine;
Eftsoons the board was garnish'd well
With malmsey, mead, and muscadel,
And luscious boughs of vine.

The ruby wine, the amber ale,
With floating toast, in spicy gale
Of clove and nutmeg brown,
Worthy ye were, brave Knights of yore,
To quaff; for readily ye bore
All hardships for renown.

So down they sat, a brilliant throng,
And joyous quaff'd, and trolled the song;
In mirth their hearts dissolve;
And o'er the table-head was seen
In magic letters, fiery sheen,
"Man wins by high resolve!"

And four-and-twenty huntsmen bold,
In belted doublets, green and gold,
Their bugle horns lift high;
A joyous roundelay they peal,
Then the same horns with ale they fill
And quaff right merrily.

Sing, oh, the days of olden time!
Full glorious, though in rudest rhyme
Be sung of Ban and Bors,
Of strong Saint George, now cold in tomb,
With Champions bold of Christendom,
Their wassails and their wars!

With tabor blithe and bugle sound,
Unto King Arthur's Table Round—

Right valiant hearts I wot—
Drink, in thy spirit's lusty glee,
And pledge, with fullest jollity,
These Knights of Camelott.

THE BALLAD OF DELORA;

OR,

THE PASSION OF ANDREA COMO.

55 not found
from this copy

THE BALLAD OF DELORA;

OR,

THE PASSION OF ANDREA COMO.

Long years are gone, and I am old;
My locks once wore the lion's gold;
Life's winter now, with double smart,
Sheds frost upon my head and heart;
And thus I stand a lonely tree,
All bare and desolate to see,
And worse within, 'since reft of thee;
Delora!

Delora!—name of many woes!
How coffin'd passion freshly glows
At that sweet sound of melody!
For thou wert bliss and bane to me;
And I ne'er since have closed mine eyes
When day-light died within the skies,
Without most agonizing sighs;
Delora!

I was a hunter of the woods,
Who scaled the rocks and stemm'd the floods;
Bounding with strength my course I sped,
And felt Heaven's glory round my head;
I never dream'd that one so free
And forest-wild, enslaved could be,—
But I became a child for thee;
Delora!

I saw her at her father's door,
Toying with his long locks all hoar;
While dim he smiled, and fondled down
The braided jasmine from her own.
Her liquid eye a moment turn'd;
With chasten'd love my bosom yearn'd,
Till time gave hope, and then it burn'd;
Delora!

Her tender love at length I won;
The old man bless'd me as his son:
Fresh glory was in Heav'n—the woods
Shone in fresh gold—the crystal floods
Mirror'd anew fair Nature's face;
My speed was lightning in the chase,
My heart began a fresher race;
Delora!

Mine eyelids glow'd, then came rich tears;
I felt as young as infant years;
Myself I scarcely knew, thus thrill'd
Like passion-flow'rs with dew o'erfill'd.
I well might fear a maid so fair
Would dread my rough and wild wood air,
And say, "Go, hug the mountain bear!"

Delora!

I won her: as a devotee
Before his shrine, so sacredly
Did I my hope divine behold,
Nor dared unto my breast to fold;
Until her father, smiling quaint,
Shook his white head and whisper'd faint,
"She is too artless for a Saint!"

Delora!

Yet still the maiden would not wed,
For sixteen summers o'er her head
In cloudy chariot had not roll'd
The beauty of their virgin gold:
And so she pray'd me to forbear
My ardent suit, with such sweet air
As real innocence doth wear:

Delora!

Meantime a Neapolitan lord,
Greater by title than by sword,
Pass'd through our vale and saw the maid:
His forky tongue in poison play'd!
She shrank before his bold address;
Her father pray'd he would not press
A suit that did his child distress:

Delora!

With haughty and astonish'd mien
Awhile he stood: "And well, I ween,
Some wood-born clown, with farm and vine,
Hath sworn to wed this girl of thine;
But let him till," quoth he, "his lands:
She'll scorn the press of vulgar hands!"
"True," said her father; "there he stands!"

Delora!

"Noble! that wood-born clown am I—
Yon maiden owes me constancy;
My *heart* ploughs not the vassal earth,
Proud as the mountains of my birth;
What if my hands should dress the vine,
Or drive a herd of sheep or swine?
My soul might measure stars with thine!"

Delora!

It is a cunning cheat of pride
To deign no answer when defied.
To sneer he strove with lips all pale;
But in his eye he seem'd to quail,
And he departed haughtily,
With train and station proud to see,
And left us on our own green lea:

Delora!

That night upon my sleep there came
A dream of roaring, sense of flame,
And, springing from my couch, I found
My cottage burning all around!
Through the red smouldering door I burst,
But suffocated with the gust,
I fell among the smoking dust;

Delora!

Ere I could rise, upon me sprang
Four armed men with iron clang!
And one I grasp and crush his mail,
Until his breath and being fail;
The others, after struggle long,
Bind down my arms with many a thong,
And swiftly hurry me along;

Delora!

They dragg'd me to the wild sea-shore,
Choked with hot dust and rage and gore,
And in a ship's dark hold I lay
Gasping and tossing night and day,
Till suffer'd on the deck to be,
I rose, and saw the wide, blear sea—
And groaning thought of thee—of thee,
Delora!

Day, night and day, 'twas ceaseless work,
Else they had toss'd me to the shark,
Or starved me. Ne'er my spirit strong
Had lent my body to this wrong,
But that a hope I treasured fond,—
A will that ever could respond,—
A deep, deep love, all words beyond:
Delora!

Arrived, they sold me for a slave!
I cursed not, nor did idly rave,
But fainting at the burning oar,
Month after month my state I bore:
And when years pass'd, like endless seas,
My high-wrought heart scorn'd Time's degrees,
Still sighing to each passing breeze,
Delora!

Five years,—and then my chains I burst,
And on the homeward wave was toss'd.
My swelling bosom yearn'd for wings,
My pulse was fancy's echoings;
Each morning did my spirit leap
From its brief rest in feverish sleep,
And homeward shot across the deep:

Delora!

Again upon the wild sea-shore
I stood. What fears my bosom tore!
The agonizing doubts of wrong
To my sweet love, I'd borne thus long,
Soon ended by some certainty!
I dared not think which it might be,—
Deep bliss, or deep calamity!

Delora!

I sought their cot beside the wood:
No cot was there! Where it had stood,
Weeds and the thorn-set bramble-flowers,
Smiled glistening in the cold dew showers.
Vain grief—no more! I sped me straight,
Haughty from wretchedness so great,
And tower'd before the tyrant's gate;

Delora!

Oh, grievous world! Oh, truth and right!
Integrity, where is thy might?
Riches and rank, titles and fear,
Oppress our life—scoff at our bier!
His vassals seized me, beat me down,
And chain'd me—chain'd me, flesh and bone!
Oh, for the thews of Samson gone!

Delora!

Fainting with wounds, thought's sharper pangs,
Darkness and thirst and hunger's fangs,
They bore me to a ship, and soon
The sea and sky, and sun and moon,
Were all we saw,—until again,
With aching heart and aching brain,
I was a slave, and wore a chain!

Delora!

I cursed not men nor stars, but firm
Bore the unutterable wrong. My arm
Was oft uplifted in my dreams;
It fell—and chaos utter'd screams!
But manhood quiet ruled the day.
Ere two years' patience held its sway,
I fled; and dash'd my chain away;

Delora!

Again upon the wild sea-shore
I stood: my bosom labour'd sore
With anguish, love, and old resolve.
Let time spin on, let suns revolve,
I change not. At the palace gates
My boar-spear smote its iron plates:
“Tell him—Andrea Como waits!”

Delora!

The porter, with a ghastly face,
Went; then return'd with ponderous mace,
And wall'd behind the loop-holed porch,
Lower'd with a leering, hound-like crouch.
Three days, unto that noble's shame,
At sunrise and at sunset flame,
I smote the gates, and said the same!

Delora!

Then came some officers of law,
With snake-like eyes and lanking jaw,
And charged me to “appear in court”
To answer crimes of fell import!
Law spake: I was condemned,—and cast
For death; the noble's word had past;
And in a jail they held me fast;

Delora!

Thrice I escaped—and thrice again
In different provinces was ta'en;
Till free once more, swift, swift I fly
To the green vales of Lombardy,—
When spent, half famished, chill as stone,
I sought one eve a cottage lone,
And saw my love! my life! my own—
Delora!

Our breathless cry, our gush of tears—
Oh, Love! 'twas weakness that endears
My present thought, if then 'twere shame
To melt my manhood. Words now came,
And we recounted all the past;
And though I slurr'd my sufferance vast,
My breath grew short—thy tears flow'd fast,
Delora!

When I was borne across the deep,
The snake o'er innocence did creep,
And held Delora in his walls.
But she fell sick amid his thralls,
And constant madness feigned, until
Watching a time, she fled his will,
And, with her father, 'scaped from ill;
Delora!

To Naples straight! I told my wrong
In many a group and market throng,
And at the palace gates I smote;
Till imps of state who fang by rote,
Seized me;—my crimes they gravely show;
“Oh!” whined the crowd “if it be so,”—
Hole-slinking worms!—“why he must go!”

Delora!

My trial came: firm, I repell’d;
The proofs all fail’d—yet I was held!
And in the end, by some foul fee,
I was unshackled privately,
And o’er the seas once more was sent,
With spirit grieved and heart deep rent;
Though never conquer’d, almost spent;

Delora!

Some error strange preserved my life,
Another met the murderous knife:
They wrote, “Andrea Como’s gone!”
But in a dungeon I was thrown,
And there in solid dark remain’d,
Till darkness by sad light was grain’d—
Like hell by purgatory stain’d:

Delora!

What time this chasm, peopled with ill,
I bore, companion'd by my will,
I know not: oh, it tries the strength,
When pain's account turns round from length,—
Confounded, seeming without end,
A tortured serpent's dizzy blend,—
Like reckoning with a fiend as friend;
Delora!

It chanced an earthquake flaw'd the land,
And shook my dungeon walls to sand.
Bruised, I escaped; the waves I cross'd,
And twice was wreck'd; on land oft lost;
Detain'd by bandits, chased through woods
By wolves and panthers; hemm'd with floods;
Gaunt-fed on berries, roots, and buds;
Delora!

Again upon the wild sea-shore
We stood. *I* stood there. Ocean's roar
Was round me, e'en as Time's hath been,—
With not much more effect, I ween.
To Lombardy I soon had flown,—
Soon found her sire—my love was gone!
I paused but for one inward groan!
Delora!

To Naples straight! With lofty mien
Before the palace I was seen.
My boar-spear smote upon the gates;
“Tell him—Andrea Como waits!”
I heard him on his couch of pain
Yell from his fortress in cracked strain,
“Blight him! and blast him! what *again!*”
Delora!

At sun-down did I this renew,
But wary grown, ere dusk withdrew,
And hied me to my native hills.
Briefly I told my countless ills,
Then with some brothers of the woods,
Enough for all his vassal broods,
Returned across the rocks and floods;
Delora!

At night we ranged before the walls:
A well-known voice with wildness calls!
She sees me from the terrace high:
“Thou’rt saved, Delora!—hither fly!”
The gates we force, the warder seize,
She comes!—I hear her garment’s breeze!
Folded in these fond arms!—in these?
Delora!

If this were bliss, 'twere doubly so
To find the tyrant's lustful glow
Infirm disease had foil'd, since he
Had thus again oppress'd the free.
Oh, in my dungeon had I known
That he on palsied couch was thrown,
I had suppress'd each rising groan;
Delora!

I wedded her at sunrise bright, '
And bore her in her garments white
Straight to the palace: at the gates
My strong spear smote upon the plates;—
“ Say thus—Andrea's virgin bride
Sends health to the great lord inside!”
So we departed, side by side;
Delora!

With heart too full for festive glee,
I bore her to fair Lombardy.
Years had not changed thy seraph face,—
Years never can thy love erase,—
Years had not dimm'd thy lips, thine eyes——
Witness, grey stone-seat! while I rise,
And clasp my hands to vacant skies!
Delora!

In Lombardy I ne'er had staid,
And distant far had borne the maid,
But that the noble late was gone
To banishment, of titles shorn
For misdemeanours 'gainst the state;
Embezzlement of riches great,
Pawning his pride for dross and slate;
Delora!

A morn—nay, was it quite a day
Before my Heaven pass'd away?
Wandering one eve near a dim pile
Whose moss-grown ruins seem'd to smile
Pale answers to the sun's farewell;
We sat upon a grassy swell
Some legend of the place to tell:
Delora!

When soon my love rose up, and sped
To gather wild flowers for my head,
As she was wont in sportive guise,
While I look'd on, with grave, fond eyes.
And now she vanish'd through an arch
Of that void pile—a ruin'd porch,
Or gateway—eager in her search:
Delora!

And long I sat in silence there
Amid the dim and silent air,
Till silence into wonder grew,
And vivid apprehensions flew
Athwart my brain! I rose the while,
And striving at such fear to smile,
Walk'd through the gateway of the pile:
Delora!

I saw the dewy wild weeds weeping,
I saw the flowers in twilight sleeping,
I saw the green mounds and the walls
That form'd the courts and ruin'd halls;
But all was void! Then hurriedly
My voice I raised and called for thee!—
And hollow echo came to me!
Delora!

With hasty stride each turn I traced,
For some fresh woe my nerves I braced;
No flowers, nor courts, nor walls, nor mound
I saw, nor heard I any sound
Beside her echoed name; my brain,
Fill'd with her image e'en to pain,
Sought her—sought, sought—and sought in
vain!
Delora!

The rack-round night at length was gone;
Hope found me in the vacant morn,
Still through the gusty pile pursuing,
Through death-like courts and roofless ruin;
Imploring—grasping—or standing on
The stony ribs of the skeleton;
Till every crevice was explored,
Each weed-tuft known, each fragment scored,
To find my heart's sole hope and hoard;

Delora!

Now through the pile direct I cross
Tow'rd the south entrance; with my loss
Still warring to out-bar despair:
The wide, blank common meets me there!
Oh! thou cold sweep of land!—waste, wild,
Suffering speeds o'er thee—thou art fill'd—
Thy dews are desolate hearts distill'd;

Delora!

Oft would I mount by shatter'd stair
The battlements; and station'd there,
Eye all the fields and woods around,
And note each spot, each shade of ground.
Thus days and nights, clouds, star-beams sped,
Till spent in frame down sank my head,
As one among the quiet dead;

Delora!

When that my fever was allay'd,
I rose as gaunt as any shade,
And cross'd unto the far off strand.
The exiled lord ne'er reach'd that land!
His ship was lost upon the main.
I roved the world—and roved in vain!
And to this spot return'd again;
Delora!

Years roll'd away—and years may roll,
But seated on the green-sward knoll,
Fronting the archway where I last
Beheld Delora's form, I cast
Mine eyes for ever on the place
For ever vacant—hoping space
Would render up to my embrace,
Delora!

And still I gaze, and hope to see
Her form appear, and fly to me!
She loved me fondly;—with that thought
Brief bliss, long agony, are bought!
Oh! from thy dark, uncertain doom,
Once issue ere I seek the tomb,
Or call me—and I come! I come!
Delora!

Peasants and travellers oft pass'd,
And looks of fear and pity cast:
I scarcely noted they were near,—
My rapt soul burns, but dwells not here;
Therefore they said that I was mad,
For years to sit thus gaunt and sad;
But I most passion'd reason had;

Delora!

Delora, spirit of my heart!
Delora we can never part!
I see thy form! angelic bare,
Thou float'st amid thine auburn hair!
Delora, templed shrine of bliss—
Thou fad'st without one clasping kiss,
And maddening space takes this, and this!

Delora!

Oh, man of ease! Oh, moderate fool!
Stunted with dulness, fed by rule,
Carping at passion with a whine,
How dar'st thou limit God's design?
The self-poised sun, the changeless sea,
Emblem'd the elements in me,—
But I was as a child with thee,

Delora!

Now I am old, haggard, and poor,
Delora; now doth winter frore,
Knot up my joints: the wild wind whistles
Thro' my coarse hair, and thro' the thistles
That on the battlement forlorn,
Nod like the shades of warriors gone,
In haze of twilight, even and morn;
Delora!

The wild goat cries i'the ruin'd hall;
The fiend-face wolf looks through the wall;
The hoarse rooks sail, and war and wail,
O'er the cleft towers, till evening pale;
The goblin owl leaves her ivy old,
There to hoot in moonshine cold;
While dim glides by Oblivion vast,—
Wan image of the spectral past!
But ne'er one look on me he cast;
Delora!

In the tenth year of this my state,
This vigil against Time and Fate!
There pass'd one eve an aged lord,
Roving alone, by conscience gored.
At once I knew him!—fain he would
Move by, but quick as mounting blood
I toweringly before him stood!
Delora!

As when a murderer sees the ghost
Of one through life he'd injured most,
After long years, rise in his path,
Dilated with immortal wrath,
So look'd he; and his jewell'd sword
Hung like a by-word! Thus o'erawed,
He rock'd, though rooted to the sward!

Delora!

"Lo! I, the man who smote thy gates,
Still live—Andrea Como waits!
Not twice ten years of wrongs and pains
Have wrought my fall: Shame eat thy chains,
As dust that fell from me! And now
We two grey men must titles show!
Hark!—retribution!—I, or thou!"

Delora!

Aghast, he reel'd; yet feigning proud,
With wavering accent cried aloud,—
"I stole her not—poor wretch, forbear!"
I seized the poor wretch by the hair,
And to a torrent's dizzy verge,
With many a gasp and wrench did urge,
And held him o'er the boiling surge!

Delora!

“Thou worm at Nature’s footstool!—thou
Unworthy shape of man!—what blow
Can quit *my* wrongs?”—I loosed his form,
And shook the grey hairs from my palm:
“Though through the cataract’s raging crown
My hand could swing thee howling down,
Go—pardon’d by the wood-born clown!”

Delora!

Yes, my deep injuries, sustain’d
From youth to age—life wasted, waned—
Mortal revenge could never quit;
Poor—temporal—inadequate.
Placed ’neath my heel, this lord had borne
My soul’s immeasurable scorn,
Which too much honoured such a pawn;

Delora!

The years roll on, and still I yearn
Beyond the grave tow’rds passion’s bourne;
And still my form upon the mound
Fronting the archway’s wreck, is found.
Green is this bank as when my bride
Was seated on it by my side;
While I—while thou!—oh, time, oh, tide!

Delora!

Full well I know, amid that pile
Are caverns reaching many a mile;
And thus, sometimes I doubting deem
My love was stolen; yet such dream
Of her removal and her death
By that lord lecher's withering breath,
I cast off, like a serpent's wreath;

Delora!

And yet, a passing wish at times
To know she's dead, my fix'd will climbs,
And draws it down from passion great,
I' the weakness of this mortal state,
Unto the deep desire of peace;
To gush out all—and die, and cease—
And find with thee a bless'd release,

Delora!

And oh! I oft, as martyr faint
With torment, hath denied his Saint,
Have question'd whether manhood high
Against all hope should lingering die
For any sweet and trancy flower?
But thou from destiny hadst dower
To win my soul, absorb my power;

Delora!

Again then do I ever turn
To hug my pang-fed sufferance stern;
Yet, though my being ne'er can cower
It cannot ward the wasting hour:
Identity, half changed with age,
Is passing like a finish'd page,—
Yet still I grasp my palsied gage;
Delora!

Sometimes, forgetful of my strength,
My fortitude's eternal length,
I whirl my clench'd hand in the air
And threaten with a deadly glare;
Between my teeth fierce whispers thrill,
“Beware of him who can, and will!”
Oh, God! Oh, Nature! nerve me still:
Delora!

And thus alone through crawling years,
Clogg'd with my groans and slow, parch'd tears,—
While aye the press without hath been,—
Driven to the unconquer'd power within;
I seem to have risen o'er my state,
O'er time, and o'er myself of late;
Mix'd with the elements of fate!
Delora!

Great, concentrated, high-wrought, pure,
Intense, impassion'd, will to endure,
Power over solitude, strong as forlorn!
Old watcher of the waking morn,
As a grey father doth his child;
Let elements be mixed and piled,
We move not, be they calm or wild;
Delora!

Oh, passion'd will! and can I say
Love rules alone this dull, cold clay?
Once glow'd it like Elysium's morn,
Ages of bliss each moment born!
My heart's core now hath lost its fire,
Hopeless, I yearn with deep desire
To see once more—fold, bless, expire!
Delora!

Time still creeps on; and still the same,
I feed and hold my hovering flame.
In darkness oft, or mute star-light,
I sit and listen all the night
To the far roaring of the sea,—
Like slumbering Eternity;
While dead trees sigh, and whisper me,
Delora!

What state is mine! How have I risen
By love's despair!—what vastness given,
Since, like a fix'd petrific tomb,
I bore my epitaph o'er doom!
My mind now roves through many a shore,
With powers it never knew before:
Thoughts, shapes, and actions, in degree
Tremendous—Titan-like—and free—
Passion-created imagery!

Delora!

But visions now too thick throng in,
And Time and Solitude must win,
And mould the long-resisting one.
Therefore, ere with wild dreams o'er-run,
These records will I leave behind,
Like love's last sighs pour'd on the wind,—
A cold, cold world is all they'll find;

Delora!

My life beyond all natural length
Holds out, though destitute of strength:
So stiff my limbs, my pulse so low,
I'm like the Image of my woe!
I feel my blood hath ebb'd away,
And moveless sit, day after day,
A statue conscious of its clay!

Delora!

I heard a voice i' the air last night,
When the hoarse fog hung smoky white—
“Image of Passion!—love, grief, will,
But man no more; time shall not fill
Thy measure, till Earth change to Sky!”
And as the accents echoing die,
Voices in myriads seem to sigh,—
Delora!

Cold are the winds on northern lea;
Cold is the winter o'er the sea:
Howl, winds! gripe, winter! shatter, wave!
Mankind do all—behold this Grave!
Seasons roll on, as morn on morn;
So, ages pass: oh, world forlorn,
The dead smile pity at thy scorn!
Time, ever childless and heart-bare,
Begins to mourn, and crave an heir.
Andrea Como sleeps—sleeps where?
Delora!

BEDD GELERT.

A Welsh Legend of the Valley and Tomb.

NOTE.

It may not be generally known that this legend has every appearance of being the tradition of a simple fact. The little Chapel in the Valley of Bedd Gelert stands there to this day.

BEDD GELERT.

A WELSH LEGEND OF THE VALLEY AND TOMB.

DEEP in the peacefulness of life

Which breathes amidst these gentle vales,

A little rustic chapel stands,

And smiles when daylight breaks, or fails.

Its scatter'd graves in soft moss are array'd,

While o'er its head

Paternal mountains hang a loving shade—

God bless the Dead!

An aged man, a rural lord
In old Caernarvonshire,
Lived happy, with an only child,
Beyond all else in nature dear.
Oh, his heart folded round this little child,
As wall and tower
Of castle-keep, where all beside runs wild,
Preserve one flower.

In the sweet morning they were seen
Breasting the mountains, hand in hand;
Retainers many fill'd his hall,
But one was chosen from the band.
His faithful dog, rough Gelert, with them sped.
Now here!—now there!—
Dashing the dew-drops from the heath-bells red—
Startling the hare!

When they were tired, and resting sat,
The shaggy servant stood close by;
Or bounded off awhile, and show'd
Heart-laughter in activity.
Yet oft return'd, and watch'd with wistful eye
For pointing hand,
Or look, or tone, that he might rush to obey
The high command!

He knew all shades of look or mien,
The varied tone, the sudden glance,
Remember'd every spot once seen,
Though full of mazes as a dance;
No serious order did he e'er forget,
No loving friend,—
He was as true a heart as could be met,
To the world's end.

His valour and his vigilance
Became a proverb of the vale;
His instincts made a small romance,
And shepherd-boys preserved each tale;
His gentleness had all the effect of grace;
And, for his form,
His only beauty was his honest face—
No common charm.

Somewhat of humour had he, too,
And oft with head aside
He seem'd to meditate on life,—
Bent his nose down, and sigh'd:
But while men sought his sentiments to scan,
Up look'd he brightly—
Bark'd—wagg'd his tail—off to the mountains ran,
With capers sprightly!

Within the castle, seven years since,
The old lord's happy child was born,
And Gelert in the castle court
Drew his first whimpering breath that morn;
Thus bred, train'd, trusted, Gelert and the child
Romp'd on the heather,
And 'midst the sunbeams, hail-showers, and winds
wild
They play'd together.

One day this grey lord sat him down
Upon a hill-side steep,
And brooding o'er past days, his thoughts
Loosen'd, and melted into sleep.
The child with Gelert in a pensive mood
Wander'd and stray'd
From the hill's foot, and through a neighbouring
wood
And its green glade.

The father woke—rose up, and gazed
On every side, but saw them not;
The hill descended searching round;
But all in vain—he saw them not!
Aloud he call'd—the mountain echoes call'd,
Near and afar!
Homeward he hied, with terrors vague enthrall'd,
While rose night's star.

The night-star rose, like a child's clear soul
Aloft in the pure serene;
The father thought, 'though idly lost,
By our hall-fire he sits, I ween,'—
And fondly hoped that Gelert still had led
With care discreet,
brought safe back, while daylight yet was red,
His wilder'd feet.

He was not there—had ne'er been seen!

With lighted brands the throng rush out,
And o'er the hills, vales, wood and glade,
Their torches flash, their voices shout.

The wild-eyed father led the search all night!

Still, still in vain!

And the first streak of wretched morning light
Brought maddening pain;

For on the heath there crouch'd the form

Of Gelert with a bloody jaw!

He had a grim and anxious look—

A panting breast, a quivering paw!

His murderous deed they all with horror see!—

The child is dead!—

The blood of his sweet playfellow must be

On Gelert's head!

The shaggy watch-worn face look'd up,
Fraught with pathetic want of speech,
He strove to rise, but down he sunk,
Yet something seem'd he to beseech,—
Watching aghast their dreadful looks around!
They stare, and crowd
Closer and closer on the crouching hound,
With curses loud!

“Fiend!—fiend!” the father scream'd, and
rush'd
At Gelert with his iron-capp'd staff,
And beat his howling skull in twain,
And stamp'd him dead with frantic laugh!
The mutilated limbs stretch stiffly out,
Measuring their grave;
And then the old man cast himself about,
Like a burst wave.

“ Monster, lie there and rot!” he cried,

Glaring on Gelert’s batter’d corse,

“ Thou wouldst his sure defender be

I well believed, whate’er might cross;

Now, hath a heart-damn’d hunger caused thee rend

him—

Oh, help!—none speak—

My dear, lost child—would no kind hand befriend

him,—

Seek with me—seek!

Slow moved they, searching round about,

And traces soon of blood they found;

The old man wrung his hands, and cried,

“ My child lies somewhere on this ground.”

And truly spake he, though in vain dismay,

For on soft heath,

Embedded and asleep, his darling lay,

Smiling at death!

The child awoke, and raised himself
Upon his little hand;
His rosy cheeks all dimpling smiled
To see so many round him stand.
The father ran, and falling on his knees
To his breast caught him,
And held him fondly thus with frequent gaze,—
Such bliss it brought him.

“And art thou safe, my little child?
Sweet flower-bud of my life and hope!
A minute since my grief ran wild—
My joy can scarcely now find scope.
I know not if I hold thee safely yet,
And surely here!”—
The child look'd round, then cried with accent shrill,
“Where's Gelert dear?”

He started up—they follow'd him,
When all abruptly they stood fast!
Before them came a frightful dream
Of struggles fix'd—of contest past—
A haggard Snowdon wolf, stark dead and glaring,
Lay on his back,
Threatening the air—of victory undespairing—
Ghastly and black!

“Where's Gelert?” cried the child again;
And while they stand confounded,
Some peasants bring a mangled shape,
With heath and grass surrounded.
And two brown paws hang mournfully adown,
Well known to all,
Which round the child's white neck, so lately thrown,
Fond scenes recal.

The child a loud and wretched wail
Sent forth, and clasp'd his hands,
The old man stood all mute and pale,
He scarcely sees, yet understands;
Then turns aside his head, and earthward bends
With close-shut eyes;
“I cannot look on it—I cannot, friends!”—
Moaning he cries.

His followers moved on, bearing still
The body in their arms;
The old man led his child along
Like silence after storms.
Of all the leaden load of grief within
No word he spake,
But sought atonement for his cruel sin
Humbly to make.

And in the gentle valley green,

He built a little chapel white;

With simple heart, and mournful mien,

He said he hoped that he did right.

“The dear remains bring here,” he softly sigh’d;

“In this small space

My once blithe, bounding friend—the castle’s pride—

Tenderly place.

“My child’s defender here I lay—

It were a fresh crime not to weep.”

His little child knelt in the clay,

And said, “Farewell! dear Gelert—sleep!”

The old man softly stroked his dead friend’s breast,

Sadly, yet bland—

“My faithful, murder’d servant, take thy rest—

Forgive my hand.”

All went, save this old lord and child,
And save the harper old,
And these three stood around the grave,
The harper casting in some mould;
Then o'er the harp his aged hands did wave—
He bowed his face;
The long beard fell like snow into the grave,
With solemn grace.

And in a low and trembling voice,
With old hands trembling o'er the strings,
The white-hair'd harper touch'd the chords;
He murmurs first, and then he sings.
The old lord and the child amid their tears
Soft chorus made,
And what they felt hath reach'd far-distant years
Through death's long shade.

“Of ancient heroes and high deeds

My harp and song have told,

And our unconquer'd hills have heard

Their fame rehearsed—the good, the bold—

But ne'er more sadly breathed a record fond

O'er true-heart past ;

And to dear Gelert's name shall love respond,

While our hills last.”

The old lord and the child then sang

The same, with voices low,—

The harper bending o'er his harp

Sweeten'd their bitter woe ;

And lastly sang the old lord quite alone,

While the harp's chords

Vibrating dimly with an under-tone,

Add sphery words.

“ Oh, murder’d honesty! oh, friend!

Destroy’d by vengeance blind and wild,
Thou the sure champion to defend—

Whom first I slew, and then reviled—

Dumb foster-brother of my child—
Forgive this hand!—oh, let it make
A resting-place for thy dear sake;

So shall this Tomb the record hold

Of thy fair fame,

While clodded years, in darkness roll’d,

Bury my name.”

BEN CAPSTAN.

A Ballad of the Night-watch.

BEN CAPSTAN.

A BALLAD OF THE NIGHT-WATCH.

OH, the wars being over,
Our brave ship we left,
And Ben Capstan and I
Went a cruising ashore.
There we danced and drank grog
Till our money was gone,
In all the old ways—
And our rigging all torn;
So Ben said men should know
When to leave off boys' play,
And we shipped in a marchantman
Bound for Bombay.

We sail'd in December,
 A hard frosty morn,
With ice on the rigging
 And sails glistening bright,
But our hearts were still warm
 With our spree in the port,
So we bowsed up our jibs,
 Trimm'd our sticks, and haul'd taut;
Rough old Ben did his work,
 With no thoughts on the weather,
And we work'd, mess'd, and slung up
 Our hammocks together.

Sharp squalls drove us off
 The Bay-o'-Biscay, my boys,
But we ran down to 23,
 North lat-i-toode;
Ben's temper was gruffish
 At times, but he bore
All rough seasons well;
 For said he, "evermore
The use of the wind
 Is to bluster at will,
And the use of the sails
 Is to catch it with skill."

Now aboard of our ship
 A Swede sailor there was,
Who from Finland had come
 Through the rough Baltic sea;
A thin, pale-faced chap,
 With a long hooky nose,
Who could make every wind
 Blow and shift as he chose—
He'd just hammer a nail
 In the bits, or pass through
The hawse-hole a yarn—
 For the Black Art he knew!

Oh, this Finlander would not
 Drink grog nor eat beef,
But oft sat a-thinking
 And talk'd of his dreams.
Ben Capstan grew savage—
 Said he, "This wont do;—
It is not ship-shape,
 Real arnest and true;
It an't sense like the sense
 We have larnt all our days;
All this fancy's no use—
 And I hates all your ways!"

That same night was Ben's watch,
And the ship ran aground—
We were out of our reckoning,
Lord knows how far!
There we stuck hard and fast
For three days and three nights,
And some took the fever,
And some saw strange lights,
Till on the fourth morning,
At break of the dawn,
The ship floated off,
Like a duck wot's just born!

A dead calm came on,
And we now could discern
A green island near,
Where the fruit-trees hung low;
A thousand sweet smells
Of all spices and flowers
Came filling the air—
We forgot our sad hours,
Felt no hunger, no thirst,
And no cares, and no fears,
And the birds on the isle
Warbled like little dears.

Now quoth Ben, "Sink my soul,

 If I understand this!

It seems all very fine,

 But the ship is becalmed!

The crew may feel happy,

 And pleasant enough,

But I know it's the Finlander's

 Magical stuff;

Such a spinner of dreams

 Is not safe to go loose,

He hates grog, won't eat beef,

 And this here's all *no use*."

The Fin sailor smiled—

 All the crew went to sleep,

For except Ben we all felt

 So *werry* much at ease;

But Ben could not bear it—

 Says he, "a ship's beam

Is a sensible thing;

 There's no sense in a dream!"

So he ran at the Fin

 With an oath and a thump,

And ran 'gainst the bulwarks

 His own forehead—bump!

Then he caught up a crow-bar
 To clear the Fin's brains,
For said he, "you're a fellow
 All made up of thinks,
And not fit to live
 In a world that needs work!"—
But suddenly out went
 The sun, like a spark!
And the crow-bar slipp'd up
 Through Ben's hands in the air,
And never came down—
 It flew off, Heaven knows where!

And out of the darkness
 We heard the Fin speak,
In a voice that was sweet
 As a fiddle and flute;
Said he, "There's as much life
 In air as in earth;
It an't meant we should know
 Half the secrets of birth;
Man's dream-work's his first work—
 In dreams the earth floats,—
If you've faith you may see
 In an acorn whale-boats."

In the air now there danced
 A bright magnet and needle!—
A flute breathed *too-tootle*,
 A fiddle spake *twcedle*!
And the Fin said,
 “ A spirit works under man’s game;
If we’re purblind, the spirit
 Works on just the same;
There’s a good thing, and wonderful,
 Come to us now!
Have faith, and don’t run mad
 To know why and how.”

Again the sun shone,
 And we saw in the clouds
A beautiful ship,
 With majestic sails!
We all grew so silent!
 When Ben bawl’d out “ Goose!
Tis a craft made of nothing—
 And nothing’s no use!”
Then he caught the Fin sailor
 Fast hold by the throat,
And overboard pitch’d him,
 Abaft the life-boat!

The wind rose amain!—

The cloud-ship was a wreck!—

The isle vanish'd—and with it,

Our sweet happy time;

With a high rolling sea,

Cross tides, foul winds, all day

The ship labour'd and groan'd

As we toss'd through the spray;

And at night we heard noises

All round, strange and 'ghast,

And a hand in a fog

Came and saw'd at the mast!

The saw shriek'd harsh shrieks

On a knot in the wood,

Till we all of us shriek'd

To the very same tune!

And now, when it's over,

Ben staggers and shakes,

Saying, "This seems a real thing—

How my head aches!

But what's it to do—

There's no use in this pain,

No more than your pleasure,—

Mere moons in the brain!"

Oh, three days after this,
 On a dark squally night,
All hands to reef tops'ls
 The boats'n did call;
Old Ben for the first time
 Was not on the yard,
And below I soon went down
 To see how he fared;
There he lay in his hammock
 Unable to speak,
With strange gleams in his eye,
 And dark shades on his cheek.

Says I, "My old boy,
 What art sickly?—cheer up!"
And I guv a good pull
 At his untasted can;
Then hung up my hammock
 Beside him to snooze,
Lest, mayhap he got worse,
 And had need of a booze;
I ne'er was much giv'n
 To y'r psalm-singing men,
But my heart beat a sort-of-a
 Prayer for old Ben.

Next morn I turn'd out
 At two bells, for to see
If Ben was still sick,
 And his watch I would keep:
I look'd in his hammock—
 But Ben was not there!
Then I traversed the deck,
 Fore and aft, to a hair;
Aloft and below did I
 Trundle and bawl,
But I could not find Ben—
 He was no-where at all!

Three days after this
 I was waked in the night
By a cold hand, that touch'd me
 Just under the lug!
I sat up all staring!—
 But nought could I see!
I felt round my hammock,
 To weather and lee;
Half naked I dropt out,
 With my limbs cramp'd in cords,
And my heart in my leg
 As it touch'd the cold boards!

The mid-watch was mine,
 So I went up—in course—
The wind scarcely breathed,
 But there fell a thick dew.
Chock-for'red I walk'd—
 What I felt, no one knows—
And wrapp'd in a tarpaulin
 Lean'd o'er the bows.
All a-thinking of Ben
 I was falling a-sleep,
When a voice bubbled up
 From the dark silent deep!

I stared through the mist
 Of the thick falling dew,
And bent o'er the water—
 But nought could I see.
Again the voice rose!
 And I heard a shrill *scrawk*,
Like the wheel of a dry block,
 Or lonely night hawk.
If a Jack-tar e'er uttered
 A poor sinner's cry
With the very best cause—
 “ Lord ha' mercy!” says I.

'Twas Ben's voice I knew,
 And I shook like a vane,
And to sheer off I tried,
 But my timbers stuck fast!
With cold chattering teeth,
 And my ear to the wave,
I heard it again!—
 It said, "No one can save!
I am Ben, thy old shipmate—
 My soul's in a noose—
I'm a drown'd sailor's ghost—
 But I can't see the use!"

THE ELF OF THE WOODLANDS.

A Child's Story.

THE ELF OF THE WOODLANDS.

A CHILD'S STORY.

IN his bed the summer sun is sleeping,
And the air is murky and cool;
The vapours o'er the grass are creeping,
Or hanging above the pool;
But a timid gleam,
Like a half-awake dream,
Comes peering and peeping soon;
Till dew-drops trickle gay
In the spider's web to play,
And swing in his spangled festoon.

A soft beam tips the trunks and leaves
Of this green silent wood,
And presently a net-work weaves,
And presently a hood;
A net-work and a hood of gold,
Spread in many a lovely fold,
And many a gleaming band,
Silently as minutes, told
Into a Lover's hand.

Oh, it is a silent wood
In this early summer morning!
Even the birds are not half awake,
But whisper their chirrups in the break,
Like a prelude of sweet warning.
It is as if the placid Hours
Hung their heads like folded flowers,
Or like sweet flowers in bud;
Still and happy, smiling and good,
As children in a morning dream,
Who move not—yet awake they seem,
Their close lids gilded by the beam.

There is a pretty cottage white,
Which also seems asleep,
Dreaming in the early light—
Its very roof and windows sleep!
Each gentle shade that fades away,
Before the rays that following creep,
Is nothing more than dreaming play—
The cottage surely *is* asleep!

What buzzing tickles yon oak-tree's foot,
Bustling and busy, with nought to be seen!
There's something fidgeting at the root,
With a foo-fooing sound like a school-boy's flute,
And a rattling like pods of dry bean!
See! see! there's a thing scarce five inches high,
With a comical motion and funny bright eye,
And a look both roguish and bold—
His limbs are all antics—he skips like a flea—
His body is brown as the bark of a tree,
Mix'd with green streaks and tarnish'd gold!

With little legs straddling,
He dances about,—
Pretends to be waddling—
Then leaps with a flout
At something he sees in the bright quiet air,
And in front of the cottage he makes antics rare!
He dances, he prances,
Gives hiccups and kick-ups,
But all without noise is his merriment made;
He laughs at the little cot!
Threatens the chimney pot!
But soft as a moth, or as light plays with shade .

Now he stops—
Now he hops—
Now cautiously trips!
On tip-toe,
And slip-toe,
He skuttles and skips;
Along the grass gliding,
Half dancing—half sliding—
Oft stooping—half hiding—
Then bolt upright walks,

And whispering talks
 To himself,
 Pretty elf;
And quaint sounds he utters,
Till close to the shutters
Of the cot that's still sleeping,
He climbs up close, peeping,
And pokes in each crevice his sharp little nose;
 Till one shutter creaks,
 And opening squeaks,
And the elfin springs down, and dances and
crows!
 Till softly again,
 He climbs to the lattice,
 Taps once, twice, and thrice!
 Puffs and blows—
And through the crack'd pane
 In he goes!

Within this cottage, lived a child,—

“Toody,” her name—she was not very big
You might judge by the plants and shrubs that grew
wild,

And o'er her head nodded or lifted a sprig.
Within the same cot there also resided
Her cousins—in love they were never divided—
Kitty and Crocus, and Tiny and Twig.
But accurate words in good time to employ,
We say “Tiny’s” a small dog, and not a small boy;
And likewise explain that Grandmamma Grey,
In spectacles, tucker, and flower’d chintz gown,
Took care of them all—often grave, seldom gay,
Yet she always half smiled when trying to frown.

Five o’clock in the morning!

“What noise do I hear below?”
Cried Grandmamma Grey. “Although it’s broad
day,
There’s no one up, I know.”
Then her head’s complete adorning—
Her turret cover’d with snow,
Skull-cap and bandage, and double-frill’d night-cap,
With puff-crown and ribbon, bows, broad strings,
and all,
Not stopping to think, and not caring what *might*
hap,

She cast off, and threw at the opposite wall!
Crying loudly, "Come children! jump up with me—
There's a rat in the dairy! run quickly and see!
Down with me, each one, as blithe as a grig,—
Toody and Kitty, and Crocus and Twig!"

At once down the stairs they ran scrambling and
fumbling,
In night-gowns and night-caps—all laughing and
jumbling,
With Tiny between their legs, barking and tumbling.

Down at last they are safely landed,
Dusky the parlour—the shutters closed,
Though one swings a-jar (which the Elfin's hand did)
By green blinds the light is still opposed.
So one by one, some rosy, some pale—
As Indians cautiously pass through a mead—
Holding each other by night-gown tail,
Dame Grey and the children in silence proceed.

They reach the dairy—pause at the door—

They look at each other—then clap their hands,
And in they bounce, as a wave on the shore

Scatters its foam on the lonely sands.

On all sides they spread, and stare round about,

But soon they huddle together in fear,
For behind a milk-jug, under the spout,

They see a small figure that's wondrous queer!

It is golden, and greenish, and earthy brown,

With a perking nose and a pointed chin,
It has very bright eyes and a funny frown,

With a russetin apple's net-work skin.

They see him! they see him!

He knows it, too, well! —

They flee him! they flee him!—

In terror pell-mell!

But Tiny springs up—and around a milk-pan

Gives chase!—now they scour round as fast as they
can!—

They whirl round so swift their two bodies seem one,
And like a dark band on a humming-top spun.

Dame Grey and the children ran back from their
nook,—

The chase takes away their breath as they look!
Till at length with a noise like a bark, laugh, and
scream,
The Elf leapt in!—and swam across three pans of
cream!

On the opposite side,
He had quickly espied
In the wall a small shelf,
And there landed himself.
“We’ve lost him! we’ve lost him!”
The children all cried!

But Grandmamma Grey,
I am happy to say,
Being in her own dairy,
Was wise as a fairy,
And quick with a jelly-bag,
At the shelf’s end,
Into its belly-swag
Swept our small friend!

Now you must know that good Dame Grey
Had prudence at her fingers’ ends,

And to the parlour leads the way,
But no one knows what she intends.
Said she, "Now, all go up and dress,
I'll leave the bag upon the floor
Mouth downwards; Tiny's watchfulness
Shall guard the window, chimney, door."
So Tiny came, and gravely stood
With both ears cock'd, and nose down bent,
While with as fix'd an attitude
The pointed bag stood, like a tent!

Soon they were dress'd, and down they came;
Breakfast was ready, the tea-kettle singing;
Toast, hot rolls, water-cresses, and ham,—
And the parlour bell still for more egg-cups
ringing!

But mute as a tree, with a truant notching it!
Stood the jelly-bag tent, with Tiny watching it.

Up rose little Toody, and said, "Don't you think
An Elf of the woods would like something to drink?
Coffee or tea, by way of exhorter

Not to turn sulky—perhaps, milk and water!”

So under one edge of the jelly-bag tent

‘Toody a saucer cautiously push’d,

Then roll’d an egg under with merriment,

‘Though silently all in the room sat hush’d.

Ten minutes they listen’d—and, then—shall I tell?

They all plainly heard the crack of a shell.

“ Away with the tea-things!” said Grandmamma

Grey:

In a twinkling the tea-things were taken away!

And Martha ran back to see what they meant

To do with the small rogue under the tent.

Cried Dame Grey, “ Bring the bird-cage—look

sharp—and run quicker!”

It once was a blackbird’s, and made of white wicker.

The bird-cage was brought, and Grandmamma

Grey

Took the jelly-bag up in her carefullest way;

Clapt its mouth to the open door—shook it,—at last

In popp’d the Elf!—the cage-door was made fast!

Now, what do you think the small prisoner did?

Shed many tears, and jibber'd and groan'd?

Crouch'd at the bottom d'ye fancy he hid,

And there his sad capture and fate bemoan'd?

Nothing like this: with one spring and ten kicks

He climbed to the perch, and himself he seated,

Like a young thing practising calisthenics,

With his hands on his pole, as if tired and
heated.

Toody ran close to the cage—so did Crocus;

Twig cried, “ Here’s mischief and hocus-pocus!”

And Kitty stared smiling; her soft hazel eyes

With wonder seem'd double their natural size.

But the Elf met their looks without a wince,

While his cheek was yellow and tart as quince,

And his tongue at one side thrust a bulb on the
skin

As the sight of his left eye slid out and in.

He sat on his perch, not the least in despair,

But swinging his little legs,—and, I declare,

With a perking, half-winking, impertinent air.

Dame Grey with her spectacles now rose up,
“ Who are you, little sir? and what may you be?
Do you know you have broken my best China cup,
And spoilt all my cream?—now, answer to me!
Tell us your story from first to last—
Where you were born—where educated—
Or here a captive for life you stay fast !—
Begin, sir, at once—all must be stated.”

Rough the crown of the Elf did bristle,
His brutus rose like a flowering thistle,
Till his anger through his nose did whistle;
But his feelings he master'd, and tried to look
Demure as a good child over his book.
Some yellow of egg he rubb'd off his chin,
And stuck like a buttercup on his shin;
Then shrugg'd his shoulders up in a hunch,
With a wheezing squeal, and a noise like Punch,
Though not half so loud. And now with a sneeze,
Like a parrot's, who suffers much from a cold,
His account of his life among the trees
He thus, in his way, began to unfold.

“ Nine white witches sat in a circle close,
With their backs against a greenwood tree,
As around the dead-nettle’s summer stem
Its woolly white blossoms you see.

Tack-a-rack, tangle tang, twangle tee!

Rills and hills,
Lawns and horns,
Hedges, sedges,
Rushes, thrushes—

Tangle dee!

With hooded heads bent ’neath the broad green
shade,
And hands laid flat on each knee,
They sat, as around the dead-nettle’s stem
Its beldame-shaped bloom you may see.

Tack-a-rack, tangle tang, twangle tee!

Woods and broods,
Birds and herds,
Eggs and curds,
Osiers, rosiers—

Tangle dee!

“ Now the witches so white they worked a charm
For the life of my mother and me,
And said in the woodlands we ever should dwell,
From man’s knavish fingers free.

Tangle fangle, jangle hangle, wrangle see!

Guns and runs,
Hops and pops,
Nettings, frettings,
Pools and fools—

Dangle dee!

“ ‘Then from hedges and ditches, these old lady witches,
Took bind-weed and ragweed, and spear-grass for
me,

And they wove me a bower, ’gainst the snow-storm
or shower,

In a dry old hollow beech tree.

Tangle dangle, suns and funs, twangle tee!

Sticks and tricks, .
Lights and sprites,
Moons, festoons,
Glooms, mushrooms—

Tangle dee!

“ My nest-home inside, is dark, warm, and soft
As the sable-hair'd breast of a panting bee;
And never in my life will I have an elfin wife,
Till the prettiest comes to court me;

Twangle tangle, kisses blisses, tangle tee!

Courts and sports,
Eyes and sighs,
Peeps and leaps,
Hands and bands,
Huts and nuts—

Twangle twee!

Ivy wreaths,
Flowering heaths,
Jays and fays,
Owls and fogs,
Bats and frogs,
Holes and moles,
Music sound,
Under ground—

Twangle dee!

Twining, shining,
Dances, prances,
Berries, cherries,

Sorrels, laurels,
Reed-pipe, seed ripe,
Burrows, furrows,
Habits, rabbits,
Paths and crosses,
Plots and mosses,
Hares and stags,
Dwarfs and hags,
Shrubs all burry,
Creatures furry,
Wren and titmouse,
Wasp and woodlouse—

Twangle tee!

Races, graces,
Woodland faces,
Quaint grimaces,
Silver gushes,
Tall bull-rushes,
Rambles, scrambles,
Bogs and brambles,
Buzzes, fuzzes,
Trailing briers,
Red wood-fires,

Squirrels, jackdaws,
Things with black claws,
Legs, horns, eyes,
Blythe butterflies,
Rush-knot shoe-tie,
Peeps of blue sky,
Distant steeple,
Bee and beetle,
Fairy people,
Small legs fleetest,
Echoes sweetest,
Joy completest—
Twangle tee—

Ri-rigdum, dingle shade-laugh, tingle dee!"

Each look'd at the other—none knew what to say.
“ This wont do for me!” said Grandmamma Grey;
“ None of your hoaxing about white witches,
Nettles and nonsense, and hedges and ditches;
I never before heard so clever a blade
At an answer in genuine rhodomontade.
Why do you prattle of woodland and stream?

What do I care how your small heels you kick up?
You know you came here to steal *cake* and drink
cream;
And, besides, you have broken a China tea-
cup!"

Hereat the Elf gazed up on high,
Through the cage-top bars with rueful gloom,
And then he gave a little sigh,
Fixing his eyes on Martha's broom;
And meditated thoughtfully.
But presently he cast a glance
At 'Toody, who was winking nigh;
And now this Elf with nonchalance
Look'd round and shouted pleasantly,
"I vow, by the tom-tit's foolish ways,
By the mole's front claws and his pin-hole eye,
The woodpecker's thorn-tongue and groundless
dismays,
I have told my biography faithfully."
Again at Toody a look he stole,
Then coolly resumed his rigmarole.

“Loitering once in a wood,” he said,
Cocking his nose with a side-bent head,—
“A wood full of rabbit-runs, spaces, and turns,
And crowded regiments of feathery ferns,
With all sorts of groundlings pleasant to see,
Such as cup-moss and wild anemone,—
I sat me down in a silent nook,

By a rill that pearl’d from a grassy dell,
And being in want of an excellent book,

I took up a pebble, which did as well.
I ponder’d much on its class and merit;
Its natural secrets my wit did ferret,—
I consider’d it in a learned spirit;

And while I was thus at study,
I heard near at hand a fussing and spirting,
And a ruffling sound of dipping and flirting,
’Neath a morning sky all ruddy.

On tip-toe I trip—o’er the bushes I look—
And close at the red-gravell’d edge of the brook,

There stood a robin bathing!
He ruffled his feathers with spattering sound,
And made himself look like a fussy round,

Or some fairy's curious plaything,
With a spangly shower all flying and splashing,
In a circle of water-drops showering and flashing!

But presently—

His eye—his eye!——”

“ His eye—his eye!” all the children cried,—

“ What of his eye?” The Elf, aside,

Once more at Toody stole a glance,

And Toody a quiet nod gave askance,

As much as to say, “ I'll find you a chance.”

And then the Elf gave a downward squint

At the close cage-door, by way of a hint;

And, after scratching his apricot cheek,

Of the robin again he proceeded to speak,—

Jumping down to the floor of the cage,

And acting a ‘ robin’ as if on the stage.

“ His eye! his eye!

The clear round mirror of jet and light,

Caught a glimpse of me.

He bobbed—took wing—and was out of sight.

Well, good folks—well!

I have more to tell!

Then up I stood in the rabbit-path,

Winding along the low banks of the rill,

Where I saw the robin taking his bath,

And I fancy I see him still!

True, as I say, he came back once more,

With a fluster'd air, and in anger; I vow
He look'd like an alderman lecturing the poor,
But meaning at last to—*unlock the cage-door!*

Methinks, I see him now!

Along and across, he hops and he flits

Just so!—on my word—just so!

Then suddenly—look, there he sits

Upon a topmost twig!

He took a flight—and then a hop—

Again a flight,

Then perch'd so light

Upon the twig's tip-top!

Look at his large bright eye,

Very round and very black;

Now he bobs, and now he bows,

Incessantly,

With head, and tail, and back;

Bob, tail—and now bob, nose,

Up and down he goes,

Then off he flies in a crack!

Upon a tall tree bough,

There—there! I see him now!

Come, Bob, come!

He sits quite dumb—

What cares he for a crumb!

Look at his breast so red!

Again he bows his head,

Bobs and bows—ruffles his wings—

Now smoothes them down, and then he sings.

How he sings and warbles sweet!

No more bobbing,

Hob-and-nobbing,

Quiet he sits, and fills the air

With music delicate and rare;

And now he glances at his feet,

Then like a gentleman complete

He bobs again—gives one quick bow,

As I do now!—

Points down his tail, and up his nose—

And *off* he goes!”

“Run, Tiny—run!—Oh, Kitty, Twig, and Crocus!
The little wretch is gone!—Oh, villain, thus to
joke us!

Run, Toody—run!—you, you are the deceiver
That loosen’d the cage-door!—I’m surely in a fever!
Tiny, chase him—Tiny, catch him!

Oh, Kitty, Twig, and Crocus—
The robin red-breast story was only meant to
hoax us!

Away—away—away!

Come all into the wood!

Follow me, I say, I say, I say,

Through brambles, weeds, and mud!”

Oh, none shall run to-day

So fast as Granny Grey,

She hath the youngest blood!

Off they all ran trooping,

And hallooing and hooping.

Beneath the low boughs stooping,
Right through the wood,
For Grandmamma Grey,
Like an old duck, led the way,
When a string of ducks trudge to a flood.
Then came Kitty, side by side
With Toody, who oft cried,
“ Oh, Kitty dear, was ever such rare fun, fun, fun!”
And Crocus close to Twig,
Both scampered in a jig,
For they knew the Elf his freedom-race had won,
won, won.

As for him, the roguish Elf,
He took good care of himself;
His mites of legs they twinkled as he fled, fled, fled!
He was scarcely seen, indeed,
He so glisten'd with his speed,
And his hair stream'd out like silver grass behind
his head!

Now leaping here, now there,

Tiny barking everywhere,
Through undergrowth and thicket made his way
with nose and claw,
Till suddenly the party
Met, full drive, with laughter hearty,
Florry, Pay, Bow, Carry, Minnie,
Ganner, Andy, Ock, and Daw!
Such a meeting—such quick greeting—
Such explaining and repeating!
All confusion, no one listening, but all for the chase;
So off the party pack
To follow the Elf's track,
And Granny Grey was foremost still in this mad race!

Now flew buttons, laces, bands,
While with burning face and hands,
Through and through, and up and down,
they troop with shout and crow!
Under, over, and across
Shrubs, tangles, trunks, and moss,
Till their hearts are almost bursting, and they gasp,
and puff, and blow!

They struggle and they strive,
Droop—lag—and then revive;
And once again they speed along and wish for
wings to fly;
They grow deaf and dizzy-eyed—
With pains in head and side;
But the Elf they cannot overtake—'tis all in vain
to try!

So the party wild with heat,
And defeat—so complete—
To the cottage stagger and retreat,—
Oh, oh, oh!
And, with fagg'd and streaming faces,
they all sit down on the floor,
'Their clothes green from bark of trees—
Torn and mudded to the knees—
With faces like red-lion signs, and feet all sore!
There they sit, a good long hour,
As for moving!—they have no such power;
And Martha with hot water comes,
each hand and face to wash.

And then, still lounging on the ground,
Cups of tea are handed round,
Their dinners they had lost, while they hunted brake
and bush.

All hungry as young hawks,
How the toast and butter "walks,"
With legs of fowls down hunter's throats,
who seem'd just now half dead;
But soon they laugh and shout,
Eat and drink, and loll about,
Till at last with laughing kisses
they all troop off to bed.

But where to sleep none knew,
For the cottage was but small,
Yet by Dame Grey's arrangement
There was room enough for all.
Three slept upon the floor
Of the largest room up stairs,
And in the parlour, four,
On sofa, rug, and chairs.

The night was warm and pleasant,—
One fill'd the window seat;
And two slept in the summer-house,—
And, oh, it was so sweet!

Within a very little nook
Toody always slept alone;
Its strip of window stole a look
Over the lawn and hay-rick cone.
Within the open lattice crept
Some jasmine from the cottage wall,
And to the breathing of her sleep,
Softly swayed, with rise and fall.
But something else comes creeping in,
As softly from the starry night,—
The Elf!—'tis he!—first peeping in,
Now like a moth doth he alight!
He trips up to the little bed;
And near it hangs a full-blown rose,
Then in the middle of the flower
Places a light that gleams and glows.
It is a glow-worm from the lea,

And lighting up the rose's heart,
A fairy grot it seems to be—
Where dream-thoughts live and ne'er depart.
And now the Elf once more is gone
Into the woodlands wild,
Leaving his blessing thus to shine
Upon the dreaming child.

THE END.

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